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IN LOW RELIEF.

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IN LOW RELIEF

A BOHEMIAN TRANSCRIPT

BY

MORLEY ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "THE WESTERN AVERNUS"

In Two Volumes

VOL. I.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL
LIMITED

1890

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WESTMINSTER :
PRINTED BY NICHOLS AND SONS,
25, PARLIAMENT STREET

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R 543 i
v. 1

McLaughlin 23 Mar. 5-3

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IN LOW RELIEF.

CHAPTER I.

A STUDY IN THE IDEAL.

“ Who was your model, George ? ”

“ Do you mean of that head ? ”

“ Of course.”

“ She is very well known. I thought you must have seen her. She sits for Tadema sometimes, and for a lot of well-known men. Her name is Morris.”

“ Is it true, or have you faked it ? ”

“ As true as I can do it. I can't fake.”

There was a moment's pause, during which the first speaker stared earnestly at the

canvas which stood aside on the oldest easel in the studio.

“She must be very beautiful; a strange and rare type. What did you say her name was?”

But George Raeburn, being absorbed in the adjustment of a kettle hanging over his gas-jets, did not answer; and John Torrington, who had asked the last question almost mechanically, took no notice of his silence, though he still studied the canvas with attention.

It was no more than a sketch of a girl's face; for the amber beads on her neck and the drapery over her shoulders were only faintly suggested, while part of the head was still as rough as it had remained when first blocked in. Raeburn seemed to have been so led away by the eyes, which were spiritual in intensity, and the hair which was just beginning to flow loose and light above the broad brows, that he had attained something by accident, if he had not indeed

painted part of a rare and strange reality in which the eyes represented a soul and the hair a mortal crown. If he did not see so much, his friend and visitor did, for Torrington turned away at last with a sigh and threw himself into a wicker-work chair which creaked under his weight. He leant his head against an old oak press upon which stood a cast in plaster of the Venus of Melos. By his left side was a curtained corner of shelves; next that, a dull coke fire burned in a fireplace with a tiled hearth; opposite him a Japanese screen glinted with golden birds. On the wooden walls were many framed and unframed engravings, water-colours, and oil-sketches. He was in the cosier part of the divided studio, Raeburn in the larger, where a litter of canvases, colour-tubes, brushes, and scattered trifles belonging to a painter made the place look more like a workshop.

“You will stay and have some tea, Torrington?” Raeburn asked after a short

silence, which he had occupied in putting things a little straight.

“Eh! what’s that?” said his friend, waking from a reverie; “tea—yes, if you like. It’s better to have tea with some one than by one’s self. I am rather tired of that.”

“Then get the cups out, and I’ll wash my brushes.”

As the dull February evening drew in, the fire seemed to gain new vigour, and asserted itself more in the dark corners where the odd cupboards held the ill-assorted crockery of a Bohemian bachelor. Torrington rose lazily, and going first to one and then the other drew forth fragments of many sets, grunting dolorously as he saw how various they were in shape and colour.

“You had better get out three cups,” said Raeburn, as he passed him to go to the head of the stairs, where his water-tap was.

“If I can I will,” growled Torrington. “Why, George, yours is an amateur harlequin set of crockery. This”—he held up a saucer of prodigious weight and thickness—“should be a survival of your most poverty-stricken days. It must be like a skeleton at your feast. And this”—a delicate china cup—“possibly represents a picture sold when sudden hope was that sales would henceforward proceed in arithmetical progression. This teapot, ah!—did not some lady fair give it you? Every time you touch it her hand meets yours, from its blessed spout comes nectar, the delicious tears of love; its rosy roundness suggests—how coldly now—her tender cheek. Sweet tea-pot, romantic old ruin! Bah! the ancient leaves at the bottom are blue mouldy, the spout is chipped, the handle cracked, the fancy faded.”

He chuckled sardonically.

“You are a foolish fellow, and must for ever be talking,” said Raeburn. “Perhaps

I bought it at a pawn-shop for eighteen-pence."

"Silence, George, silence, let my illusions alone. Have you none yourself, or have they gone blue mouldy too?"

He turned and laid his hands on the artist's shoulders, suddenly serious. Raeburn smiled and then sighed.

"Nay, oh artist!" cried Torrington, "you have some yet. When the artist has no illusions he is either dead or successful. But this is nonsense, and beside the mark. Where's the milk?"

Instead of looking for it he sat down, while Raeburn sought in vain.

"William never brought any, the careless scoundrel," he said at length. "I must run across the yard to Armour's and see if he has any."

"You need not trouble for me," shouted Torrington, as George quitted the studio.

"No, for some one else. If any one comes let him wait."

Torrington leant his head against the oaken press once more and stretched out his long legs, trying to discover a comfortable attitude in a wholly impossible chair, for he was a considerably bigger man than Raeburn. The fire, which he had replenished, suddenly gleamed a little and cast a light upon his features, which were overshadowed by a vague mass of thick and long brown hair, and seemed with the accentuation of flickering shadows more than irregular. His eyes were expressive, though inclined to be melancholy in silence or solitude; his jaw was firm and square, but so neutralised by the mobile and fickle lips which were rarely set, and the quick glance which was seldom steady—save in direct and earnest talk—that the face it seemed to give character to left an impression of mingled power and weakness which made any accurate judgment of the man at first sight impossible. He was a modern neurotic type, though physically powerful.

Very certainly he was of a nervous temperament, for his lips trembled as he reflected. His thoughts ran in a familiar channel suggested by this tea-making. It was the manifest duty of a woman to make tea, thought Torrington, and it was a manifest injury that he should have to make it himself. He had said anything was better than having tea alone. It was another insult that he should be so often obliged to take it in solitude. It was the duty of destiny to supply him with a comfortable home, a respectable income, and—a wife. Many artists have had the same thoughts as they toiled supported by little more than their belief in themselves, and though Torrington was not of the species painter he believed himself generically an artist, even when he wrote pot-boiling articles for a solitary and meagre livelihood.

Some men really solilique off the stage, though it is only solitaires who do, and Torrington muttered aloud :

“The world’s wrong, civilisation and the Caucasian are both failures, things are crooked, and the universe doesn’t work. At least my part doesn’t. Carlyle was a humbug. Why shouldn’t a man have a right to happiness? He might keep his blessedness. I will take that later on, please; it is black coffee and a cigar after dinner. I think he did keep it so close that not even his wife discovered it. Ah, his wife!”

He twisted in his crazy chair until it creaked again and then lay back quietly. Very quietly, and almost in a dream, for the foolish fellow was conning the elusive phantom of an ideal vision. What should such a restless dreamer need? He had often asked himself, and answered it thus:

“A woman who is both good and beautiful, and yet poor enough to come to such a home as I may, by striving, give her. She should be a light in its darkness to a man who is not naturally sad nor naturally evil,

but who has never known pure or prolonged joy. A woman, thoughtful and sympathetic, who will not be wholly wax in my hand nor utterly stubborn; who will love me more for what I would be than for what I am, and whom I shall never know entirely. For there is a strange fire in mystery, and I am apt to despise what I believe I have fathomed. But where shall I find her, where? ”

He sighed a little bitterly and came back suddenly to facts, when Raeburn's quick step was heard on the stair.

“ You have been a long time, George,” he said.

“ I haven't been more than five minutes,” answered the artist, putting down the milk; “ you must have been asleep.”

“ Perhaps,” said Torrington, in an altered voice. “ I was dreaming of a phoenix. Let us have tea.”

“ In a minute,” replied Raeburn. “ I must wait.”

The studio was rapidly growing dark, for the sky was overcast and threatened rain. Indoors the low fire only twinkled on the dull brass-work of the old press and gleamed vaguely on its lack-lustre wood, while the gas under the kettle, beyond the dark dividing curtain, gave no more light than sufficed to discover its presence. For a few minutes there was quiet, only broken by the singing of the heated water. Presently the lower door at the bottom of the stairs creaked, and a step was heard.

“Some one is coming up,” said Torrington.

“I left the door open on purpose.”

As Raeburn spoke there was a knock, and he called :

“Come in !”

By her light step and rustling garments, the new-comer was evidently a girl.

“It is I, Mr. Raeburn,” said a sweet soft voice which pleased John Torrington’s susceptible ear. Looking up, he saw no more

than a vague and slight figure which stood against the golden screen.

“I expected you would come, and tea is almost ready.”

“Then I am not late?”

“Ah,” said Raeburn gallantly, “you are always too late for me. But let me introduce Mr. Torrington to you.”

John rose from his shadowy corner and moved forward a pace or two. He was already pleased with this woman, whose face he had never seen, who was as yet no more to him than a voice.

“It is surely dark for an introduction, George,” said he. “Besides, you have not told me whom I am being introduced to.”

“I beg your pardon, I’m sure,” said Raeburn. “Then this is Miss Morris. All of us about here love her. She is like light to us.”

“I can believe that even if I only see you darkly now, Miss Morris,” Torrington replied, as he held out his hand with a

warm impulsive gesture. For although he was unable to see her face distinctly, yet it seemed beautiful, and her voice at any rate was so pleasant that his own instinctively took a tender accent in sympathy.

“Have you brought the curtains?” asked Raeburn, when she was seated.

She answered in the affirmative, and laid a roll of stuff on the table.

“I wanted to see if they fit.”

“No matter if they don’t,” laughed Torrington. “Anything will be better than the collection of holes which he at present dignifies with the name of curtains. He is very careless in the use of language.”

“I dare say,” remarked Raeburn, as he brought in the steaming kettle and put it on the fire, thereby rendering the studio darker than ever. “You see I sometimes differ with Torrington, Miss Morris, and dare to have opinions of my own about my own art at variance with his. You see he may be a poet——”

“He is, of course,” said Torrington shamelessly, “a great one. But, George, a light.”

“And a journalist or what not, still he doesn’t know everything. And as to the curtains——”

“Be quiet, George,” said John, with a mock air of firm and gentle authority. “Let me alone now. And do bring in that light.”

His friend smiled at him, and brought into the smaller apartment the movable gas standard, with its four flaming jets over which the kettle had been boiled. Torrington now looked at the girl with covert curiosity and almost started. Surely he had seen her before. Those great soft eyes and that mass of loose hair seemed strangely familiar to him. But how? “Ah!” he said suddenly, and stopped. She looked at him and he turned away. He had recalled the study of a head which stood on Raeburn’s easel. It was she, assuredly.

While they had tea he talked rapidly,

though with intervals of sudden silence, and made the girl laugh with his aimless chatter, full of quaint metaphors and odd similes. When he did hold his tongue he sat looking at her whose monosyllabic answers seemed eloquent to him, so greatly was he affected by her sweet and rare beauty. After tea, she and Raeburn looked over the new curtains together. The artist was so pleased with them that he gratefully called her an angel.

“No,” said Torrington suddenly and very seriously, “not an angel, George, an angel is not human. You mean a saint.” For he caught the girl’s pure profile against a golden bird on the screen, and standing thus with her hands clasped, she reminded him of a young madonna whose gravity was as yet no more than the imminent shadow of pain, and as vague as the glory coming to her in recompense.

“Yes, you mean a saint.”

He repeated the words two or three times

to himself, and rose to go. When he saw his hat in his hand, Raeburn turned towards him.

“ You are not going yet ? ”

“ Thanks for the implied invitation, but I remember I have an engagement—with a sinner—and I am always punctual. Ah, it is my only virtue. I pride myself in it. If I lose that I am morally done for. I am like an artist with one eye, or one arm, or—or—well, or like a crab with one claw, or an amputated octopus clinging desperately to respectability with a single sucker.”

“ It is a good thing you are not endowed with eight tongues,” put in Raeburn.

“ Thanks,” chuckled Torrington. “ Good-bye, Miss Morris. Did you say she was a model ? ” he asked, in a low voice, drawing Raeburn outside the studio.

“ I did ; so she is.”

“ A model ! ”

It was said more in wonderment than anything else, but to Raeburn his voice

seemed to have that doubtful ring in it which those accustomed to studios could interpret. It annoyed him.

“Yes, a model,” he said warmly, “and as good as she is beautiful.”

Torrington glanced at him curiously.

“I never said she was not,” he replied, after a moment’s pause. “I can see she is good, and I think she is beautiful. Or perhaps I ought to say I can see she is beautiful, and believe she is good. Though to be sure goodness is a queer thing to define. She reminds me of something, perhaps something I saw in a dream once. Yes, I do think she is beautiful. But there, to a man like me any really sweet woman ought to be lovely. Well, good night.”

The two friends shook hands and Torrington descended a stair or two.

“By the way, whose studio is that last one on the other side opposite you?”

“Oh, that’s Armour’s place. I got the milk from him just now.”

“ He looked a fine fellow, as I thought,” said Torrington. “ I was a little curious to know. Good night again.”

And he went away without any more questions.

CHAPTER II.

MAIDEN LANE AND MARY.

THE group of studios in which George Raeburn and Paul Armour lived and worked some five years ago reckoning from eighteen hundred and eighty-nine, lay not further than half a mile from the last remaining colony of rooks in some ancient elms on Haverstock Hill. In all there were six of them, built on opposite sides of a yard entered by a wide gate and paved with concrete, upon which lay a few blocks of rough marble. Across the narrow lane was another long studio, occupied by West the sculptor, to which was attached a shed containing works in progress and others long past hopes of sale, while at its northern

extremity a bronze-casting furnace sometimes shot at night a blue flame far above its iron chimney. The lane itself was a "no thoroughfare," encumbered with sundry old carts, belonging to the owner of the property, which were gradually falling to pieces, and the vague melancholy which always broods over a spot of little traffic in a busy neighbourhood made the place seem as far from the respectable houses in the near streets as the artists were in mind from the people of worldly activity or the retired bourgeois who occupied them.

John Torrington had spoken to his friend Raeburn concerning the artist who occupied the opposite studio, because he had been struck by him in a manner which afterwards seemed curious and almost prophetic, seeing that the threads of their lives were suddenly to be twisted together in an unexpected and remarkable way. Though he had but lately come to live in intimate contact with this isolated group of workers,

they had had a very decided influence upon him already. Whether it was entirely chance or an inborn tendency towards another art than that he deemed his own which had led him into the neighbourhood of Raeburn, formerly an acquaintance but now a friend, it is difficult to say ; yet when he had taken up his abode in Camden Town he had an incontrollable impulse to spend most of his spare time in surroundings which were not only congenial but novel as well. He became almost a part of the place.

Torrington's earlier life and training (or rather want of training, for he had grown up nearly wild) made him easily fall in with the freer ways of Bohemia. The impossibility of controlling him had led very early to his leaving home ; many years of his early manhood had been spent in aimless wanderings about Southern Europe and and Northern Africa ; many more on his return to England had been wasted in a

vain effort to make himself part of the ordinary civilisation to which he ostensibly belonged. In the end he became a journalistic hanger-on to some London papers, and picked up a precarious livelihood by pot-boiling articles in various magazines. He also wrote verse, which, if not brilliant, was at least fair in quality, and by adding gradually a certain flashy dexterity in water-colour work he bade fair to become an artistic jack-of-all-trades. Yet there certainly seemed at times promise of better things in him, if rare flashes of brilliancy and some moments of solemn earnestness bore witness of the truth.

Perhaps the interest he took in Paul Armour, to whom he had never yet spoken, was in one way creditable to his instinct, if not to his sympathy. For though Torrington little knew it, the greatest trials and triumphs and defeats of his life were inextricably mingled with those of Armour; and strangely enough, although he was so ig-

norant of the future, there was a certain heaviness about his heart as he passed that day out of the lane, a heaviness which lasted until he suddenly recalled Mary Morris's face, and brightened as he did so. He thought of her often during the next week.

Paul Armour was a man of an original stamp, or at least one who seemed original in these times. Perhaps in the days of the Italian Renaissance he would have been a commoner type, but still remarkable for a certain silent strength, both of mind and will and of body. He was scarcely handsome, but the character of his face was beyond mere beauty, and bore that cast of thought which is not morbid brooding, but a healthy intent of meditated purpose. He looked sad when alone or when unmoved, but the sweetness of his smile when he greeted one he loved, or thought of something which was beautiful and inspiring, gained much from that very melancholy in its subtle contrast, just as the glory of the afterglow

is intensified and made manifest by the lower tones of the earth, which no longer receives the direct rays of the sun. And every one that knew him liked him, a strange thing in a man of evident power and talent.

He had lived in the same studio in Maiden Lane, as the blind alley was usually called, although it bore no painted title at its entrance, for nearly four years, and had occupied himself purely with art, and his particular branch of it, which was line etching.

He worked hard and laboriously towards such a technical dexterity as would enable him to do the work he knew himself best fitted for, and took but little relaxation, though the piano, which occupied far too much space in his abode for material comfort, was a great, perpetual, and increasing delight to him. Perhaps it was her love of music which first made Mary Morris ready to visit him, and having once

entered the place, her feminine instincts led her to help him in the adornment of his abode. In this voluntary service she did no more for him than for Wynne and Raeburn, to both of whom she occasionally sat. For Raeburn was one of her earliest employers.

To many outsiders studios are mere dens of dreadful impropriety, and the habit so common among artists of treating all the days of the week as the same, adds sometimes a religious odium to the old notions of Bohemian art-land, which have not died out. Yet, as artists may nowadays be gentlemen, so they are not all libertines, and a girl who respects herself will be respected there, even though she be a model. This Mary Morris speedily discovered, although it took some time for her to free herself from nervousness when she first took to sitting, after the death of her father, who left no means to support his two young daughters. They went to live with their only relative, an aunt, but

soon becoming aware that work of any kind was preferable to such wretched dependence, both of them found an employment in which Mary's strange and saintlike beauty usually kept her fully occupied. Yet in spite of that she often found time to run into her new friend Armour's place, when she was sitting for any painter in the neighbourhood.

Armour was intensely wrapped up in his work. One day his neighbour Wynne, who had been a friend of his from the earlier days of their training, asked him whether he ever meant to get married.

"No, I think not," was his answer, "or at least not for some time. It is bad, it must be bad, for one's art. A man ought to have one aim, and that aim his undivided attention. In one sense it would be like suicide, for to have a number of children to keep almost necessarily compels us to do potboilers. And I want to do only good work!"

Wynne agreed with him emphatically.

“When I marry,” said he, “I should like to get some one who would be a help, not a hindrance. One ought to marry a little money, eh?”

“I daresay,” answered Paul, without knowing quite what he said, for he would not have assented to the painter’s question unconditionally. The conversation had set him thinking about a matter which troubled him no little just then. For it occurred about a year before Torrington met Mary Morris, who had been accustomed for some time to see Armour once or twice a week or even more often. He was not a vain man, no one was less so, but nevertheless there was a possibility that she might become fond of him. Sometimes he thought the mischief was done, and he felt very conscience-stricken when he made this declaration to Wynne. He determined to speak to the girl in a way which would, he thought, free him of this responsibility. Certainly it was only right that he should.

Two days afterwards Mary came as usual, bringing some little feminine knick-knack which she herself had manufactured, and after thanking her rather coldly, as she felt, he went to the piano and played quietly, while she sat in a large wicker arm-chair looking at the artist and musician pensively.

“How I love it,” she said, when he paused.

He turned over the music slowly.

“So do I,” he answered. “I wish I could play better. Well, I dare say I shall have to put up with having some one near me who can do it better.”

Mary could not play at all.

“And,” he went on deliberately, though he felt anything but comfortable, “I think I shall have that.”

“Yes?” said the girl inquiringly, though without lifting her head, which rested on her hand.

“Yes,” he answered. “I shall get married

one of these days. And she plays very well indeed."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mary spoke so cheerfully as to make Paul quite at ease again.

"You must tell me, Mr. Armour, when it is going to happen, and I will give you a present."

"Thank you, Mary," he said gravely. But strangely enough he took up Schumann's *Addio*, and sang that.

This happened fully a year before John Torrington met Mary Morris in Raeburn's studio, and since then things had continued quite in their old way. But nevertheless it was very commonly reported among the other men that she was engaged to Paul, for having no purpose to serve by spreading the news of an engagement which did not really exist, he did not tell others what he had told her. And it was in this way that John Torrington afterwards came to believe that the girl he admired was engaged to a man

whom he soon got to know and admire as well. For there is nothing which appeals so to a man of many and diverse aims as the strong single purpose, or to the lax man, who is not utterly bad, as a pure morality without pretence.

CHAPTER III.

A CIRCLE OF THE INFERNO.

DURING the whole of the spring of this year Torrington had been so extremely unlucky with regard to making money at his business, that he was more than once so hard pushed as to be hungrier than was reasonable. It is true that his disposition was naturally idle, and no less true that he might have done better if he had worked harder; but having little purpose in life, he deemed it almost as well to spend it in dreaming as in labour, until he felt the hard pinch of poverty. That reacted upon him again, so that he could not work even if he tried. And the end of it was that his brain began to get worried. He even contemplated suicide in

a way that was the more dangerous as it was quite calm. But it seemed that he was reserved by Fate, if not for better things, at least for a longer trial, since an editor—who had usually declined his work with a continuity of perseverance in evil-doing which maddened unlucky Torrington—at last accepted an article on condition that the author excised all his pet passages. This he did with much lamentation, but when he received the proofs, the first he had handled for more than six months, his gratitude and relief were as intense as his melancholy and oppression had been before.

“Now I can go into the country,” he said to his friend Arthur Gaskell—a man of something the same disposition, who earned his living by the most precarious draughtsmanship—as they walked on Hampstead Heath one evening late in May. “I can borrow a fiver on what is coming from this article, and get away from the maddening whirl of town.”

He suddenly stopped and caught Gaskell's arm.

"My God!" he said, in a tone which was dreadfully serious. "You don't know, old fellow, how near I was, even a week ago, to killing myself. It would have killed my poor mother too, if I had. How I thank this blessed magazine editor. I almost wish I could thank heaven too!"

Gaskell pressed his arm kindly. Poor fellow, he too wished he could make five pounds. He certainly had not seen so much for a long time. But Torrington went on talking excitedly.

"Think of it, think of it, that so little should mean so much to us. I didn't know the heavy weight that was on me till now. I didn't know how I was being crushed out of sanity and existence till this day. Now I can get out of it for a while and watch the sea come in white on the beach, and hear it lap quietly on the rocks, and listen to the wind and see the stars through the

smokeless air. Yes, think, in a week I shall look out of some window at night time with only a few people about me. I don't know why it is, but many months in a city with millions maddens me. I suffer for their sins as well as my own. I feel their life, and it is too much for my brain. And then to think how many people are happy—in homes—with wives and children. Do you know, I wish I had children of my own. It is miserable being alone, miserable.”

“Yes, it is,” said Gaskell, with a dull throb in his own heart. For he too had a love story of his own.

“That,” went on Torrington, “is the reason I am such a brute. Sometimes I am as low as a dog, or lower. Oh ! life is a cruel thing to men such as we. We ought to have been born with just enough brains to be the merest blackguards. Then there would be no repentance. What is that but sorrow in vain when there is no Paradise for us ? And there is none, none at all. No, none.

By the way, Arthur, do you know Paul Armour well?"

"Pretty well," said Gaskell dully, for he was thinking of his own troubles, and a girl's face came up to him in the gathering darkness like a star across the lightless heath.

"What kind of fellow is he, or rather, what do you think of him? I own I like him very much, better than he likes me, I fancy, though I have been in his studio once or twice lately."

"I think he is very clever," answered Arthur, "and he is a good fellow too, I should say."

"He is going to marry Mary Morris, isn't he?" asked John, vaguely wishing to hear that it was not so. For though he was by no means in love with the girl as yet, her face haunted him more and more the oftener he saw her. And now he saw her often enough. But Gaskell's answer supported common rumour.

“I suppose so,” said he. “She is often there, and they say as much.”

He relapsed into silence, and Torrington sighed a little, but did not speak. Yet his thoughts ran again in the channel they had occupied just before he first saw the girl he had in his mind.

“Yes, a woman who is good and beautiful, and poor enough to come to my poor home. For I am not so evil as I seem. I would be better if I could. She would make me so, and love me for what I wish to be. And I mustn’t understand her altogether.” He laughed so bitterly that Gaskell stared at him. He turned round towards his friend.

“Yes, Arthur. I have made up my mind to marry the next woman I meet who numbers among her ancestors Venus Anadyomene, the Sphinx, and Sir Galahad. That is to say, if the latter ever got married himself. I forget. No, I remember he didn’t.”

Arthur, who always let Torrington do the talking, did not answer, probably because he did not understand, and they turned homeward. When they came back to the verge of the dark heath, from which a vast part of lighted London could be seen, Torrington stayed once more and pointed down the slope.

“That is the best example of a hell we are ever likely to know outside our own minds, Arthur. And now we go down into it, you and I. I don’t at present see any road out. I wish I did. I have no fancy for the Inferno. I am going out next week it is true, but I return again. Probably I shall come back worse than I went, a greater, gaunter pig than before, perhaps with a fainter nose for the divine than I have now. For I am going to live on pig-nuts. Can, can Ca-caliban,” and he hummed Caliban’s drunken song through.

“You’re a nice companion,” said Gaskell, staring at him. “I thought you said you

were much saner than you were. I confess I fail to perceive it from your talk."

Torrington burst into a roar of laughter.

"Poor fellow," said he at last, "I am sorry, but I never said I was saner. What I said was, if I remember, that I no longer feared I was going mad altogether. Now I'll tell you what. Suppose I were to get married and have about a hundred and fifty a year, and be fairly happy in my companion, there wouldn't be a saner man in this mad city, or a lighter man, or a less bitter man. But you see I want the chance. Now if I get it——"

He paused a moment and whistled a bar or two of the Dead March.

"I will bury the past deep, as deep as the lowest depths in Tophet. But if I don't——"

And he paused again, meaning to go on. But he did not, and they got to the bottom of Haverstock Hill before either of them spoke. And then their words were but

“good night,” supplemented by a warm hand pressure, for they loved each other in a fashion.

“‘They be all mad in England,’” quoted Torrington, as he went home.

At the end of the week he was in Devonshire.

CHAPTER IV.

PAUL ARMOUR'S STUDIO.

TORRINGTON'S departure westward was at the end of the last week in May; about which time the great general exodus of London artists yearly takes place. Few, save here and there the merest studio painter who never troubles to take a fresh look at nature, remain in town then if they have, or can beg or borrow, the wherewithal to get into the country, and though it be no further than red-roofed Surrey, or that unknown Essex which most Londoners firmly believe is entirely level and without even a wooded rise, the artist is content to be free from the smoke and smell and garrulous clangour of London town.

At first, Torrington showed his uneasiness of disposition by remaining in no one place longer than a fortnight. Knowing Devonshire well, he stayed first in Bideford, then in Barnstaple, and after trying Clovelly, which gradually became too fashionable for him, he went to a little village called Croyd, and there apparently settled down. He had brought with him a quantity of manuscript paper, for he was lazily ambitious of doing something bigger than an article, but it remained a reproach to him. He spent his time in swimming, fishing, and boating, while every night or evening he sedulously courted some village girl or another in order to kill the time; and more than once narrowly escaped trouble with some irate young fishermen who wondered what the Londoner wanted there at all. Yet Torrington did no particular harm, and had nothing to reproach himself with when he went away, for he did not lack a certain morality which, though narrow, was sufficient to prevent

him doing deliberate passionless mischief to a fellow-creature. He used to say, carelessly enough, that that was not more praiseworthy than not throwing stones at a country jackass or not ill-treating a horse.

“I have heard,” he remarked once, in a very moral conversation, during which he had been taken to task by a much worse man than himself, “that it is very easy not to write a tragedy in five acts. It is pretty nearly as easy not to act the heavy villain in a real tragedy if you are not quite selfish. Do you understand? No? Then here’s a moral apophthegm for you. If you can’t eat salt fish, go without.”

His companion stared at him, no doubt with a great deal of reason, and Torrington laughed.

“Do I speak darkly? Am I Lycophron or Heraclitus? I suppose so. But I won’t interpret to you. Go home, thick-head, and think it out.”

And with that he turned away. For he naturally delighted in puzzling a man he despised.

Yet when his better self came to the surface he threw aside his amusements and walked for hours on a long solitary stretch of sand, dreaming rather sadly of his life that was passed, and not altogether hopefully of the portion yet to come. The man was a dreamy nature, strong in feeling, weak in will, and his good intentions failed, as some crops do in northern lands, not from the poverty or unfitness of the soil, but from the brevity of the season of hope. His autumn for ever cut short the reign of summer, and winter trod hard on autumn's heels. He was always making up his mind to do something which should greatly succeed, and then—did not care much whether it did or not. Because he had nothing to work for, so he said, forgetting that he might have what he needed if he worked. If any friend of his

told him so he answered in the language of fatalism.

During the whole of this holiday he never quite forgot Mary Morris, and when he wrote Arthur Gaskell to send him another sketch-block, for he made a certain pretence of working in water-colours, he asked about her. Somehow he was glad that Arthur did not answer that part of his letter. If he had been sorry it would have been a bad symptom, and yet his being glad was not wholly a favourable one. He thought so himself, but dismissed the matter to chaff a fisherman's wife from his window. And he did it very well, so well, indeed, that when she went back to her house with the pitchers of water, she declared to her Trinculo of a husband that Mr. Torrington was the most amusing gentleman who had ever come to the place. Trinculo assented, for John had stood him a pot of beer the day before.

During the greater part of this time

Wynne and Raeburn had been staying at Lynmouth, and were hard at work painting. Torrington did not go to them, in spite of a desire for more intellectual conversation than could be got in his village, partly because they had a good deal more money than he. Probably his sensitiveness on this point was superfluous, but that was the reason he gave himself. The real reason was more likely his belief that Paul Armour was with them, and though he liked him very well, it was not without a certain dull feeling of jealousy that he thought of him in connection with Mary. The man was fairly prosperous and happy. In a little while he would be able to stop the girl sitting for a living, and would marry her. What had John Torrington to do with such a happy man unless to serve as a *sauce piquante* to his dish? He would decline the office; and thus he remained at Croyd.

Yet he might certainly have gone over to

Lynmouth without meeting Paul; for the latter, who never gave Torrington a thought, was still in London, working at a series of etchings to illustrate the book of a luckier or more laborious writer than John. He was there still when Torrington returned on the last day of August, having just about a sovereign in his pocket to meet all expenses for some time to come. It was a fortunate thing for him that his landlady was a most gentle, amenable, and fairly prosperous person, who liked him too well to trouble him for money if she could help it; although I much doubt if she would have taken him in again if he had once settled up and gone away. Yet Torrington, being always in her debt, had, as he sometimes smilingly remarked, a hold upon her which his goods and chattels scarcely counterbalanced. When he reached home he merely left his bag there, for feeling the solitude and heat irksome, he determined to go round to the studios on the chance

of finding some one in them. There were others with whom he was acquainted besides the five men in the lane, and he at any rate counted on seeing Gaskell, who never appeared to have enough money for a long holiday.

The heat of the noon was so intense and the white dust of the main road so unpleasant that it was quite comforting to turn into the quiet lane which ran north and south and was lined on its west side by a few elms that cast a grateful shadow over a high wall in a ruinous state of preservation. As Torrington passed Raeburn's and Wynne's he took no notice, being aware, of course, that they were away; but just as he was on the point of knocking at Gaskell's studio he heard the piano in Armour's place, and, tempted by the sound, stepped inside the outer door, which he found open. He knocked at the inner door, which was just ajar. The music ceased, and Armour came

to answer him. He smiled pleasantly, a smile which was without mirth, but grave and sweet always.

"Oh, it's you Torrington, is it? Come in," he said, opening the door wide, "come in. I'm glad to see you. Just got back, eh?"

Then Torrington saw that Mary was there. He let go Armour's hand, which he had shaken, and advanced towards the girl.

"Ah, yes," said Armour, "you know Miss Morris?"

She laughed lightly and looked at Paul.

"Of course Mr. Torrington knows me, Mr. Armour; don't you remember we met here just after the Academy?"

"I dare say," replied the other, as he sat down. "I think I do remember."

"And before that twice or more at Raeburn's," said Torrington. "Indeed I hope we are quite friends."

And he sat down by her side.

"How are Raeburn and Wynne, Torrington?" asked Paul, taking off a cap which he

might have dispensed with in such weather, if it had not been his habit to wear it.

"Well enough, I think, but until I heard your piano I thought you were with them. I understood that was the arrangement?"

Paul nodded.

"So it was, and is, but work kept me in town. But you don't say you didn't go over to Lynmouth? Wynne said you were near in his last."

"I was close, I own, but—but I didn't go over. Too lazy, or too busy fooling round," said John.

"What, didn't you work, Mr. Torrington?" asked Mary.

"I'm not a painter, Miss Morris," said he, "and I went away to amuse myself."

"And you did it, eh?" said Paul. "You look well enough."

"I am well, and I did amuse myself," answered Torrington. Then he added recklessly, and with a certain emphasis, "scandalously."

“ Oh!” said Paul, a little stiffly, evidently not pleased, and that made Torrington sorry for such a speech. But seeing her there put him a little out of temper. He said to himself, “ I am a good mind to ask him if he really is engaged to her the first chance I get.” But he never did.

“ If you don’t mind my staying for a while,” said Torrington, after a moment’s pause, “ please play something to me. I have heard nothing since I left London, and music is like water to me. I can’t get used to going without drink. I like expensive kinds too. Please draw me a draught of Beethoven.”

Paul smiled at the conceit, and answered in the same vein.

“ He’s not on tap. But a commoner vintage you can have. Will Mendelssohn do?”

“ Admirably,” nodded Torrington, and he began to roll a cigarette as Paul played, taking in the surroundings as he did so,

for it was the first time he found himself sitting down there quietly. But before long almost everything in the studio was to be burnt into his brain. For what we see about us in great sorrow or great joy remains for ever with us, just as a stamp coming on a copper plate leaves its own impress on one side and the inequalities of the bed on the other.

The studio was long and narrow, and would have appeared longer yet but for a curtain drawn across the end, which concealed a truckle bed of simple and almost mean appearance. The room was lofty, with a north light, and on the wooden walls were a number of Armour's own etchings, together with aquatints and mezzotints done by other men. Even the screen which kept the draught out by the door had its adornment of pictures. Besides the black and white reproductions and original etchings, there were a number of good water colours, some few of which Paul had done himself,

while others were the work of neighbouring and friendly artists, with whom he had made an exchange. Near the door was a large stove, the chimney of which ran close up to the ceiling, and then passed through the wall at a right angle. The furniture was simple, for besides the piano, which was on the left, there was nothing but one table covered with papers and books, and another which formed the artistic and characteristic feature of the place as indicating, to one who knew, the nature of the work done there. It was covered with etching tools of all descriptions, with bottles of chemicals, with dishes for the greenish acid, wherein the copper plates, some of which still unused glowed there red and bright, were bitten, while above it at an angle was suspended a white tissue-paper screen to so subdue and diffuse the light while Armour worked that the reflection should not prevent him following the graving tool with the accuracy such a delicate task demanded.

A shelf of books, among which were many English poets, and a pile of music on the piano, indicated the degree of culture to which his naturally artistic nature had been able to attain in spite of the incessant work which had raised him to a position of comparative eminence in his profession.

There was, to Torrington, something extremely pleasant in the picture which the man made as he sat at the instrument playing. For one thing Paul's arms were bare half-way to the elbow, allowing one to see the play of the great muscles which seemed far too great, either for a piano or for etching, since Armour was immensely powerful in build, and might have sat for a gladiator. Yet with all his strength his expression was so exalted and curiously different from what one naturally connects with great bodily strength, that it would rather have suited the head of some mediæval and very thoughtful Florentine. It is true that from some points of view he

was not handsome; indeed, before the end of this story we may learn that a frivolous woman considered him ugly; yet his profile, as Torrington saw it while he looked up and away, was what might be called even beautiful. For it was then almost melancholy in the expression of a mournful theme, which he played with feeling if not with great skill of execution. It was as if he were performing a religious rite. He looked capable of anything unselfish, of self-sacrifice, of renunciation. But Torrington did not think that then. He was looking at Mary Morris.

The pencil of Raphael and the pen of Dante might do her but scant justice, though they mystically joined together to accomplish at once her beauty and almost pathetic purity. The type is common in no country, and very rare in England. And now as she sat listening, with her head bent a little sideways to rest upon her open palm, she seemed, even in the strong light which poured from

the broad glass above her, too ethereal and fragile to be quite mortal. Yet as her eyes half closed, and their long lashes shadowed the pale yet rounded cheek, veiling the soft brown pupils, the attitude of resignation, which came as naturally and truly to her as though she had been influenced by some sorrow even before her birth, showed she was not only truly human but a woman, who was no longer a child, as well.

Her hair, which was very abundant and soft, dropped lightly and loosely about her temples, that showed faint blue veins under a delicate skin, pale rather from an indoor life than from ill-health, and was drawn backwards to be fastened, rather negligently, in a knot near her neck. That was very finely modelled and slender, bearing her bended head as the lily's drooping stalk bears its crown. Her hands were well shaped but not very white. They showed marks of work with the needle.

And the music ceased.

Torrington rose with a sigh.

“Thank you, Armour,” he said softly, for he was easily influenced, and now Mary added strangely and subtly to the charm of the harmony. “I am always glad to hear music. And I am glad that I am. It shows I am not altogether evil, which I sometimes suspect, not quite dimly.”

Armour smiled and ran his fingers lightly over the keys, while Mary rose and put on her hat.

“You are a strange David to be musician to my Saul truly. But, well, I am only talking nonsense after all. Good-bye, and good-bye to you, Miss Morris.”

He turned away, but stopped. Armour looked up.

“Are you going away at all?” he asked.

“Certainly,” replied the artist, “in a day or two. I am going to join Raeburn and Wynne at Lynmouth, if they are still there. I must do a little water-colour work to keep

my eye in for colour, or else I shall see the world all black and white, and mere lines at that. I suppose you have finished your holiday ? ”

Torrington nodded.

“ My money too. That’s the cause. Therefore I am here with three million others who have the same good reason. And you, Miss Morris, are you going away ? ”

The girl smiled and shook her head.

“ No, Mr. Torrington, but I am to have a holiday. I shall not sit for a week or two.”

He smiled at them, nodded, hesitated a little, and finally took himself off. But he wondered that Armour did not see she got a real holiday.

“ Why doesn’t he marry her at once ? By Jove ! if I knew him better I would ask.”

But he didn’t know him better, you see.

CHAPTER V.

SAINT PRISCILLA.

How Torrington lived, in a material sense, during the next few weeks, it would have puzzled him to say. For having taken it into his head to write a novel—a whole three-volume novel—while at that he did nothing else ; and having by neglect lost a pupil who was learning Italian, he neither troubled himself to find another, nor to write the little articles, nor to do the trifling sketches by which he usually managed to get bread and cheese. He simply wrote and wrote, getting later and later each day, until in a couple of weeks he was rising somewhere between four and five. His landlady thought he did it to

save a meal, and if she was not quite right in that, he was often hard pressed to find even two sufficient ones.

His idle time, which was between five in the afternoon and ten, he spent in walking, or in sitting lazily in Gaskell's studio, where he sometimes did an abortive water-colour sketch. He went into Armour's studio with Arthur the day before the etcher went to Devon, and there had a conversation, which not only showed him at his worst, but rather worse than he was, seeing that Armour naturally knew but little of his best side. And, as events proved, he had some reason to regret his talk, of which, strangely enough, Mary Morris was the innocent cause. For he had met her on his way through Camden Town, and she, being busy thinking, did not notice him. Although he knew quite well that she did not see him, he was very irritated, and said loud enough to astonish an old man who was just then passing him, "Damn all

women!" And when he was in Armour's studio he enlarged on that as a text.

"What did I do in Devonshire?" he said. "Oh, for one thing, I did a few million (more or less) sketches, of which I still possess—say ten. And I behaved very badly indeed."

He winked at Gaskell, who laughed, and went on without noticing Armour's face, which showed a decided distaste for the elegant extracts from his late career with which Torrington proceeded to favour him, flavoured as they were with the many strange oaths, learnt in his travels, that invariably garnished his conversation when he was angry or excited. When he went away Armour turned to Gaskell.

"I don't know what to make of that Torrington," said he. "He's clever, every one says that, and I can see he's no fool. But he's a blackguard in a good many ways, and a libertine."

He meant a profligate, but the distinction

is not very obvious to those unaccustomed to handle language nicely. Gaskell shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t understand him either,” he answered, “But he is much better than you think. I have heard him talk worse than he has this evening, and then he has turned round and read me some stuff of his which I am sure was good, and which I couldn’t understand his writing. But it’s a pity he swears so. Then he’s a very well educated man.”

“Then that’s all the worse,” said Armour. “He ought to be ashamed of such talk, to say nothing of acting as he does. Isn’t education held to be an aggravation of a crime?”

“I suppose so,” was Gaskell’s vague reply.

“It ought to be. And to tell the truth I don’t much like him. Though to be sure, when he is quiet and looks straight in my face, I fancy I do. I suppose he must have led a very strange life.”

“Yes,” said Gaskell, “and if you had been with us when we walked on the heath before he went away, you would have thought he was mad. He’s had some bad times, too.”

“We all have,” said Paul a little shortly. But he dropped poor Torrington with that and thought no more of him. Torrington, after all, was nothing to him. And nothing to his life. So he packed up his traps and went down to Devon, where he was greeted quietly by Raeburn and uproariously by Wynne, who, being a handsome man, was the centre of a bevy of young lady students, who imagined they loved art, when they only adored an artist. It is no uncommon case.

Torrington went on meanwhile with his story and his starving simultaneously, and was thus producing something so morbid that there was even a certain chance a publisher might be attracted to it by its pathological peculiarities and buy it of him

as a curiosity. And he still went to Gaskell's as usual, where he varied his bursts of wild talk with fits of silence which were sometimes the result of a scarcity of the tobacco that these two commonly shared between them. In the same way when Gaskell had enough food to spare Torrington partook of it, and when he had little or none he sometimes went home to John's room and had what was going, which, to say the truth, was often very little. So if fasting has a good effect on men it ought to have made both these better than they were. But to quote a recent writer, "incredible as it may appear . . . there are men who resent their poverty," and Torrington felt a great deal more like revolt than resignation, in spite of his condition being in great measure due to his dreamy nature, which, to use his own expression, was content "to let things slide."

Things, indeed, slid along in a curious way, and he was coming to a point in his

life. Just before he found that out he had a talk with his only feminine friend, who gained a poor enough living by teaching, and as he had the floor as usual, they talked about life in general and his own in particular.

“I know I am morbid,” he declared honestly, but still as if he was rather proud of it than otherwise, “and so I take a morbid view of things. Perhaps I see things out of focus; perhaps I am morally colour-blind or mentally myopic; but nevertheless I take an interest in life and get a good deal out of it. Sometimes, it is true, I think living is a mistake, but that’s only when I find it very hard to live. When I get enough to eat life is intensely interesting. I am nearly always in the first or second volume of a novel.”

“Writing one, you mean?” said Miss Mowbray, who had known him for years, and had argued about ten thousand things with him.

“No, I don’t,” he returned. “I mean living one. They are mostly not very serious; sometimes they are even comic; sometimes I am a subsidiary character, sometimes a chief one; sometimes even a poor substitute for the hero, and occasionally perhaps the villain. But in whatever capacity I act I am interested. I have just finished one. In that I was a sort of detective, in whose hands Fate put a dozen different clues. I didn’t play the villain’s part, however, and as far as I know that novel ends there. Of course it may go on, but at present I am out of it. In fact I have nothing in hand now.”

“What, nothing?” asked Miss Mowbray. “Pray, aren’t you the lover in any story?”

“No,” Torrington declared earnestly. “I am twenty-nine and haven’t been in love for five years, so I have almost forgotten what it felt like. I don’t even know now whether I took it very seriously. I hope I got over it, for what’s the use?”

He turned very solemn for just a moment. Yes, what was the use? For where was he to find his ideal? He went on again:

“However, the main thing is that I am interested. I know nothing more interesting than life, and it pays to take an interest in a game one is playing. I dare say I shall have a new story on hand soon, a real one I mean. I hope to finish the novel before long.”

“Yes?” said the teacher; “and what is that about?”

“It would take too long to tell,” answered Torrington. “But it is undoubtedly very morbid and most disagreeable. It isn’t immoral. I didn’t mean that; but the man dies, you know, and every one is very wretched indeed.” And here he almost smacked his lips, while Miss Mowbray burst into a merry peal of laughter.

“But why do you write such things, Mr. Torrington?” she asked, when the fit passed.

“I can’t help it,” said the author. “You

see, happy things don't appeal to me, and I can't be bright and cheerful on paper to save my life. I wish I could. It's quite enough not to have the blues when one comes out of one's burrow. I dare say cheerfulness will come by-and-by."

"In the next romance you live through, I hope," said she. "You must come and tell me that it ends very happily, and that you were the hero this time."

He laughed heartily, by no means looking as morbid as if what he had said were true, though it certainly was, and rose to go.

"If it does, you shall know," he said gaily, and so departed.

This conversation was a curious prologue to the life he led the next month or so. For one point in this story came next day when he met Mary Morris at the foot of Haverstock Hill. He had not seen her since she had passed him unwittingly in Camden Town, but now, as if to show him how wrong he had been in his irritable

estimate of her, she was the first to see him and to show it by smiling.

"Ah, Miss Morris," he said, "I am very glad to see you. And to see you repent for cutting me dead two weeks ago."

"Oh, Mr. Torrington, I never did, I'm sure," the girl declared.

"Well, I don't really believe you saw me. So I forgive you. How well you look."

She certainly did, for there was a better colour in her face than he had ever seen there, and in her straw hat and rather loose æsthetic frock she was looking charming as she stood before him in the warm sunlight.

She laughed.

"Well, Mr. Torrington, I think it is because I am blushing a little," she said quite simply. "It is very strange, but I believe you always make me blush. It is because you look so intently at me, I think."

There was a certain naïve compliment in this and the way it was said, though it was

quite true. John had a curiously steadfast way of looking at people when he talked with them.

"I'm glad," he declared lightly, "that I have so much power over you. But how is Mr. Armour?"

He asked it quite seriously, but to his surprise Mary looked just the very least annoyed.

"I don't know, Mr. Torrington," she said.

"What," he cried, "haven't you heard from him?"

"No, I haven't."

"But why not?"

"But why should I? It is too absurd. Every one comes up and says, 'Oh, Miss Morris, how is Mr. Armour?' It's quite ridiculous. I have been asked it twice to-day already, and now you are the third."

Torrington grew very serious. If she spoke in this way she surely was not engaged to Paul. Certainly she was not

crafty enough to hide the fact so well. Yet every one said so. The thoughts passed through his head like lightning. Surely it was best to know the truth. Perhaps she was not aware what people said. She ought to be told.

“Well,” he said, after a moment’s pause, “don’t you know——”

“What?” she asked.

“That people say—mind, it’s no business of mine, but I think it’s only fair to tell you—that you are engaged to Mr. Armour.”

She looked him straight in the face without blushing. “It’s not true, Mr. Torrington. And it never will be. Why, Mr. Armour is engaged to some young lady in the country.”

Torrington whistled gently.

“Hum,” he said; “well, I’m glad I’ve told you. A girl ought to know what is said. And, of course, I thought it was true, for I was told so months ago, soon after I first met you at Mr. Raeburn’s.”

"Then you can contradict it," said the girl.

"I will most loudly," said Torrington "in tones of thunder, with a speaking trumpet, and the voice of a town-crier. For—well, no matter. Do you know, Miss Morris, I have got a new name for you?"

She started a little.

"No, Mr. Torrington. What is it? I hope it's pretty."

"Very pretty," he declared; "for it suits you. It is Saint Priscilla."

She looked rather pleased.

"I wonder no one thought of it before," he said, "for you look like a saint."

"Then I wish I was as good as I look."

Torrington shook his head wisely.

"Nay, my dear girl, no one could ever be as good as you look, but I believe you are as good as any one can be. That is as much as a mortal may, these times. I shall see you soon. Are you working now?"

"Yes," said the girl. "I am sitting to

Mr. West, the sculptor. Oh, he is a dreadful man to sit to ! ”

“ We must make him mend his manners,” said Torrington. “ Good-bye, Saint Priscilla.”

“ Good-bye, Mr. Torrington,” she said, and they shook hands. He pressed hers just a little.

That night he did not work, but walked up and down his solitary room, which somehow did not look now as if it were so by fate and for ever. He did not think clearly or put his thoughts into words, but seeing his past life he bit his lips with anger, hearing his own spoken words he winced for their folly. He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind, he thought, but came to no conclusion. At last he put on his hat and walked right down into Oxford Street, and further still to Charing Cross, hardly knowing whither he went. When he returned he was very tired, but things seemed to have dropped into order once

more. Life was not all chaos. He had a new hope, and with it a sweet desire. Nothing stood in his way, for he might accomplish his dream and be no more solitary and alone. For here was the woman he had looked for, free, free! How was it so sweet a girl had not been borne by some lover from her toil in triumph, far from cold studios and long hours of labour, in which the muscles grew so cramped and tired? Why they must have been blind, blind, all of them.

He rose up from his chair and spoke :

“By heaven! the girl shall be my wife.”

And as he went to bed he thought of the lovers in the “Blessed Damozel,” who spoke “their rapturous new names,” and he fell asleep smiling as he murmured, “Saint Priscilla.”

CHAPTER VI.

A VISION IN MARBLE.

TORRINGTON did not let the resolution he had come to interfere with his work. He indeed went at it with renewed vigour, seeing that there was now a certain possibility of money and success being more necessary to him than it had been hitherto. Within a week the book was finished and sent to a publisher, who returned it with what the author considered wholly unnecessary celerity. He then despatched it to another, and went to see Gaskell, to whom, being then full of his own affairs, and in fairly good spirits in spite of this repulse, he related at length his method with his natural enemies the publishers.

“ You see, Arthur,” said he, as he cleared a space on a table and sat down, “ that I send it to one who has a good reputation for steadiness and honesty. If he returns it (and he does invariably), I send it to one against whom no one ever alleges anything in the least criminal, but who is reputed more venturesome and speculative. When he returns it (and as I said before he does so without any hesitation), I send it to another whom the Incorporated Society of Authors would warn one against. He is my last chance. If that kedge anchor doesn’t free the ship from the mud flat of manuscript, I put the detestable creation on the volcanic mountain I add to at intervals, and start another. I don’t blame them at all. They know their business. That’s in their favour. I don’t know mine, as is evident, or they would buy from me. That’s not in my favour, I own. Still I must keep at it, and I will.”

“ You do at any rate,” remarked Arthur

rather sombrely, as he worked at a sketch in water colour. For he knew Torrington's volcanic pile well.

"Of course I do," replied the other, resuming his parable. "Hang it though, what a consolation Balzac is to an unsuccessful author. I don't mean that I am a frost-bitten Balzac, Arthur, though I suspect you wouldn't know the enormity of my vanity if I did. Because you can't read his language, you miserable wretch. But what's that you are doing?"

He slid off the table, and in so doing dislodged a bulging sketch book, which fell on the floor with a crash, and disgorged its contents. He took no notice of that, however, and went to look at his friend's work. It was a simple enough study of a girl in sunshine, but it took his fancy. The reason he knew full well.

"It's rather like Mary Morris," he remarked. "I tell you what, if you'll give it me, I'll owe you ten shillings, Arthur."

The artist grunted.

“ I don’t want your money. Take it and welcome, for I shall never sell it.”

Torrington shook his head.

“ Thanks, old man,” he answered, “ but I’ll give you something. Next time I come in I’ll bring you a new canvas, say a 24 by 18, or half a pound of tobacco. Have you got any now. Oh, yes, here it is. Then I’ll roll a cigarette and be off.”

Which he accordingly did, but instead of going into the main road he turned to the right and knocked at West’s door, hoping he might find Mary there. The sculptor, who had met him three or four times at the other studios and asked him to call, opened the door, with his sleeves rolled up, and his hands exceedingly dirty with clay.

“ Oh, it’s you, Torrington ! Come at last, eh ? Well, come in,” and he characteristically offered his wrist for him to shake, which the other did with a smile. For no one could meet West once without liking

him. Unless, perhaps, he were a rival "image maker," with more jealousy than judgment.

The studio was divided into two parts, and was, even in that warm weather, exceedingly cold. It was filled in both compartments with work in clay, marble, and plaster, while many pictures decorated bare brick walls. A huge stove in the centre gave promises it never fulfilled, though it was urged to its duty ever so much, while the various draughts, which contended there for the mastery, imparted for ever a waving motion to the bundle of reeds and grasses which decorated both the corner where the sculptor usually sat to write and the coats of his visitors.

West was a man of the middle height, very strongly built and powerful in the arms from continually using the hammer when working in marble, with a very bright and pleasing face, which indicated both sensibility and refinement. His eyes were

almost sparkling in his merrier moods, but grew intense and solemn in the rarer moments when he spoke out to some sympathetic soul what a man usually keeps silence about, his hopes and desires, his aims and methods, his feeling for nature, for the world and man. For he was intensely spiritual under a thin cover of materialism, and gloried in his art, which he held to be based on Truth and Right, as both consolation and reward of the worker.

“You don’t mind my going on, of course,” said he to Torrington, who knew by intuition they were much in sympathy, and felt at home at once. “So I’ll finish building up this clay. I have a sitter coming in the morning.”

“Haven’t you had one to-day?” asked Torrington.

“Yes, Miss Morris was here this morning. Go and look at that relief over yonder.”

Torrington rose and crossed the studio to where a slab of marble was placed on a kind

of revolving easel, solidly fixed in a block, and there saw, strangely enough, not the Mary Morris whom the other men knew, but his Saint Priscilla, purer than any mortal, melancholy, and down-drooping, but sweet and very fair and reverent. It was a lovely piece of work considered only as such, but to him who saw it, it was more, for now he was almost a lover of this woman. He stood on the very verge of passion, and a touch might overwhelm him deep in its troubled and bloodstained sea. He almost received that touch then, for here was a man with sight like his own, and insight perhaps deeper, since the accomplishment of his vision in the stubborn marble could not equal the unattained ideal that the artist saw in the reality.

"It is very beautiful," he said, rather moved, and West, dropping a lump of clay, came over to him.

"No," said the sculptor, "it is not beautiful. She is, I grant you, but I fail, I

fail! I see so much more and can't get it. I shall cut it back and start it again."

Torrington looked, as he felt, almost horror-struck at the notion.

"No, West," he exclaimed, "don't do that; it would be almost sacrilege. Remember there are limits to work such as yours, and you can't get beyond them. You have succeeded. I have seen sketches of her by the other men. But they didn't see her thus. Why, I spoke to her the other day and saw this. I called her Saint Priscilla. How beautiful she is!"

He stood in silence, while West shrugged his shoulders at his own work with utter dissatisfaction as he went back to the baser clay, and slapped it about as though in irritation. Perhaps he hardly knew that he would never satisfy himself. That is the bitter reward of the true artist, whatever material he works in. Be content, ye other mortals, for he shall never be content.

At last Torrington turned away.

“ I’m going now, West. I’m very glad I came in. But I won’t look at anything after this. Tell her I saw it, and liked it. What a sweet face it is ! ”

“ Yes,” said West fervently. “ She is sweet and good too.”

Then Torrington again shook him by the wristband, which humorous proceeding did not strike him as at all comic, and going out into the lane went home again.

About three days afterwards he met Mary at the entrance of Maiden Lane and stopped. After a few words he spoke to her about his visit to West’s.

“ Yes, Mr. Torrington,” she said, “ he told me about it. But he has begun it all over again.”

“ Yes ? ” said he. “ Has he cut it back ? ”

She nodded, and Torrington felt quite angry with the sculptor.

“ He will never get again what he had,” he exclaimed. “ I know it.”

He was quite right, for though in the end it was beautiful, there was something gone, something which was as hard to define as it was subtly felt in its eternal loss.

“Ah, I don’t know,” said the girl. “He is very clever. But he is very hard to sit to. Sometimes he swears ——”

“Not at you?” cried Torrington, almost savagely. “But no, that would be too absurd to swear at a saint who was being patiently carved for some high niche in the church of the arts.”

She shook her head.

“Oh no, it is at himself, and the hammer and the chisel, or the marble. The other day he threw the hammer almost through the door, and looked so miserable that I cried. Then he said he was a beast to worry me, for it wasn’t my fault.”

“I should think not,” said Torrington warmly; “a saint’s fault indeed!”

The girl looked up and laughed.

“Ah, you mustn’t call me a saint. Indeed I have a very, very bad temper, and can get in a great rage sometimes.”

“I don’t know why you shouldn’t,” answered Torrington, “there are plenty of things in this world to make even a saint angry. Beside, your saintship I take to be plus your womanhood, not minus.”

She looked a little puzzled, as well she might, for what he meant was certainly not correctly expressed, but did not answer.

“You must have a long talk with me some day,” said he; “I should like to know how you came to be yourself. Are your sisters like you, that is if you have any?”

“I have one, but she isn’t a bit like me. You see I’m like my mother. But I must go now, or Mr. West will be furious. Have any of the other artists come back yet?”

Torrington shook his head.

“No, but I think it won’t be long now.

I heard from Mr. Wynne. He said Armour would be home first. Aren't you glad?"

It was said with a certain touch of jealousy, but the way she answered put him at rest, it was so entirely open. Yet that is not always a sign with a woman.

"Why of course, I am, Mr. Torrington, for he was always kind to me. But then every one is. Good-bye."

He raised his hat as she went, and stood watching her.

"D—— it," he muttered, "but I wish I could stop her going to that chilly hole of West's. She doesn't look very strong, and such a place might sow the seeds of consumption in a bronze Hercules."

As he went down town to the British Museum Library, where he was at work digging up information about an early and unknown Italian poet, with the hope of making an article out of his bones, he mused and almost soliloquised.

"I wonder if I could make her fond of

me. I don't see why not. Women have been fond of me before this. I'm not particularly ugly, and I'm fairly big and strong. Besides, even my enemies say I have some brains. That ought to be enough to start on. Then I'm earnest enough when I am earnest. And that is the great secret in courting. That and perseverance, which indeed it implies. Well, I don't know. I think it would be wise, to put it on that ground. "The expanse of spirit in a waste of shame," says Shakespeare. Hum! I think I'll ask her to go somewhere with me. and then, if she seems to trust me, I'll get her to come round and see me. Hang it, she goes to the studios. Perhaps she'll come to see me. She shan't repent it anyhow. I think that's the conclusion. And the moral resolution."

Which he certainly intended to keep.

CHAPTER VII.

THE END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THINGS do sometimes happen, even in common-place lives, which fall as pat to the purpose as the most ingenious forethought in fiction could ordain. Torrington wanted to take the girl, whom he now began to look upon as his future wife and peculiar property, to the theatre, and for a day or two vaguely hoped that a kind providence would drop enough money into his hand. He had indeed want of money for such matters as food and rent, though he managed to scramble along just then without any absolute starvation, but his present purpose required at least ten shillings, and such a sum he could by no means command.

“It is true I could sell some books,” he reflected, “but then it takes a big pile of old classics and modern poets in cheap bindings to make up the amount. Borrow I won’t. Am I not now up to my fool’s ears in debt? I must consider.”

His consideration lasted three days, and on the third an actor whom he knew slightly sent him two orders, not entirely by chance it is true, for John had mentioned to his sister—he had one, and one only—that he was desirous of taking a friend to the theatre, and she, discreetly refraining from making inquiry as to who this friend was, told the tragedian what her brother wanted. The receipt of the orders made Torrington sing aloud, and he straightway sent a note to Mary Morris.

“DEAR MISS MORRIS (or rather DEAR SAINT PRISCILLA),

“I was very poor just now; but at present I am rich, very rich, having in my possession

two tickets for the Globe for to-morrow. I want you to go with me. You might take it as no compliment if I said I could think of no one else who could go, but really it is true. You see with all the men away what can I do? Still if they were here, all angrily demanding to be taken, I should ask you first. Don't refuse, for if you do the tickets will be wasted. I won't go alone, for it takes two people to see a play, just as it takes two to make a quarrel. Let me know at once, or I shall be ready to take my share in the last-mentioned kind of entertainment.

“Yours very sincerely,

“JOHN TORRINGTON.”

To make sure of its delivery he left this letter at her lodgings himself, for she lived no more than twenty minutes' walk away from him in a quiet little house, where she had the two small rooms at the top. The

situation was none too pleasant, indeed none of the closer quarters in Camden Town can be considered desirable, and two undertakers, rivals in their dismal trade, made the short street somewhat more melancholy than it might otherwise have been. Opposite, too, was a chapel with a cracked bell, and next to that a shoeing forge, which could be smelt afar off on busy days. John cursed the locality as he looked at it.

“She has no business to live here at all. She shan’t always,” he said earnestly.

Some people might have wondered whether she might not come to live in a worse place if she were to marry John on an income which varied from ten to fifteen shillings a week. But Torrington saw all things in a sunny light just then, even though the autumn was earlier than usual, and was giving way, even in October, with tears to winter. He went home through the rain in perfect content, and waited for her answer without any misgivings, although he might have

had some if he had known with what feelings Mary Morris read his letter. But she accepted his invitation and made him happy, for he had nothing else to judge her by than her acts and words, and had not yet come to analysing either.

He had to borrow some money after all, for his entire cash amounted to no more than eighteenpence on the following afternoon, which was too little to pay for fares and some very possible refreshment.

At seven o'clock he knocked at her door, and giving a loud rat-tat, she came down herself.

"Come in, Mr. Torrington, please. You are punctual, aren't you? I'm not ready yet, so you must come upstairs and wait."

Torrington shook hands with her warmly, without speaking for just a moment. He wondered what kind of a place she lived in; what kind of setting this rare pale saint had, who was yet so blithe and cheerful. He knew it must be poor.

“I don’t mind waiting, Priscilla”—she laughed lightly at this “rapturous new name,” which he spoke with a certain tenderness—“for as long as I am in time myself, no one can blame me. Take me upstairs, if your landlady isn’t a fierce dragon who abhors men.”

“I don’t mind her in the least,” said Priscilla. “Sometimes Mr. West calls here, and Mr. Vyse, the Academy student, and Mr. Armour, too, if they want me to sit and don’t care to bother about writing. And she doesn’t know you’re not an artist.”

“I hope I am,” replied John lightly, “but that’s a mere detail, and hypercritical. Is not a versifier an artist? Yes, to be sure.”

They entered her sitting-room, which was lighted by a lamp and a bright fire, for it began to get chilly of nights. Besides, she did her cooking there, in the same way that Torrington sometimes did his in his room, which has not yet been described. Hers

was nearly square and very plainly furnished, with but one comfortable arm-chair, yet it was on the whole very tastefully arranged and decorated. On the walls was an etching of Armour's, and an oil painting of a harvest field by Raeburn; under the table was a terra-cotta bust of herself by West, and on it a medallion as well. That same table, which was set between the windows, had a large basin full of yellow and white chrysanthemums. Torrington smiled when he saw them.

"Are you fond of flowers?" said he, without letting her see the smile.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Torrington," she exclaimed, "I love them, and especially these soft white blossoms. Some one sent them to me last night. I thought it was Mr. Armour who had come back, for now and again he gives me some; but——"

"He comes back to-morrow," said Torrington. "I heard from Raeburn this morning."

"Then I taxed Mr. Monk (you know him, in the Raven Road studios), and he wouldn't say yes. But I know he did."

"Indeed!" said John; "then he'd better—not equivocate again—because——"

Priscilla (it is better to call her so, for Torrington always did) turned round, and seeing his face, clapped her hands.

"Ah!" she said; "I knew you sent them. I was really sure, but wanted to find out. Thank you very much. Now I'll change my dress, and if you like you can smoke a cigarette. I don't mind smoke at all."

"A very good thing," said Torrington as he sat down, "for I smoke a good deal."

Though that was when she had left the room, it never occurred to him that he was hurrying matters a little, that he was discounting the future on small security, and might do better to be a little less sure. He was now on the very verge. Even yet he might have drawn back, saying firmly, "No, I will not love this girl. I will think no

more of her, and go my way alone." But then, if he had said so much, he would not have been quite John Torrington, and the word "alone" would have but confirmed what was now his purpose, and to-night would be his passion.

He waited very calmly though the time went on and it grew a little late. It was sweet to be in this her room, to think that she slept beyond that thin wall, that she trod here daily, and was to be won to adorn his home which did not yet exist. He leant back as he felt the enervating warmth of the fire, and with its heat came her influence wrapping him closer and closer, like a very faint odour which steals on the senses and soothes the soul even as music played softly. Was she not like a flower, like music, like a song about a blush rose set to a sweet tune born in the brain of a lover? Yes, she was as soothing as falling water. And soon, John Torrington, she shall be like a flame of fire about you, a very fervent

heat that shall burn you to ashes, or refine you to the best within you, or show you clay for ever. But he dreamed on idly and flicked away the ash from his cigarette as it measured out the long full minutes of the reveries which usher in a storm of passion. And she entered the room.

There are pictures in every man's life, to some but a few, which are faint and remain not deeply impressed on the brain; to others a great gallery full of the vivid and varied interest of an ardent and impressible life. John Torrington had seen some strange and beautiful things in his little time, whose memory was both sweet and bitter to him. He saw, or could see in a quiet hour, the faces of those whom he had loved in his youth, faces of men and of women, faces real and faces imagined in dreams which remained as realities. There were immense and terrible landscapes before him, and in them he walked alone; there were pictures of great cities crowded with

human beings where he had been lonelier yet; there were sunny nooks of pleasure and shadowy groves of pain wherein the ghosts of great dead hours walked with lightless lamps like the foolish virgins, but in his gallery there is one sweet picture, which should be always dear. For he calls it "Saint Priscilla," as she was when she came to him who heard the first faint prelude of the passionate music whereof she was the theme. Beautiful, beautiful she was, beyond the poet's words, beyond the brush of the painter, even beyond the high and sacred art which can be expressed in the cold, sweet purity of marble, and yet he who saw this had to speak in strange commonplace words, leaving the apt and fitter worship of reverent silence. Yet he was silent enough that night.

The play was but a melodrama, wherein the villain triumphed, as usual, for four acts, and banged the sapless and unlucky hero on every opportunity, until, in the fifth,

virtue was at last successful, and had the pleasure of seeing vice laid dead at his feet.

But Torrington never knew even as much as that. What he saw was Priscilla with a single white chrysanthemum in her hair, and one upon her breast, as she bent forward with breathless interest and prayed for the extinction of the "heavy man," who scowled at the audience in a manner which was approved by hisses from an enthusiastic and for the nonce virtuous gallery. For Torrington was playing over the drama of his life, and saw things past and possible things to come. The man was exalted strangely. Let us follow his thoughts and set them straight and plain.

"I never played in the prologue, and don't know much of it. It lasted for strange thousands of years, I know that, but who my ancestors were I cannot tell. There must have been some devils in it, and perhaps a saint or two, like Priscilla, who sent me down a drop of pure blood. And

perhaps a madman, certainly a philosopher. And again a gipsy, for I have loved to wander. For I am the outcome of it all. Perhaps I should not have been if the Israelites had not crossed the Red Sea; perhaps the Roman Republic begat me, or the State of Athens. More likely the Huns and Goths, the Visigoths and Vandals. A Genghis Khan or a Semiramis, Rameses or Romulus, an angel descended or a devil risen. For I am a result, and manifestly a fool—but with some brains.”

He smiled strangely and Priscilla looked up. For the first act had ended. When the curtain rose his thoughts wandered again.

“Does not the first act begin in pain? What was my childhood? A cruelty, through ignorance, not through malice. A time of strange visions. I used to look up into the sky and wait the apocalypse. I am waiting yet. At nights, too, visions of terror which perhaps were prophecies. Even then I

loved nature, and could see it more than most children, not only near flowers and birds, but far skies and distances under the skies. And all the while my home was almost hateful to me. Yet I thought that was in the course of nature. What a pity I started so, on such a key-note.

“What was the second act? My school days I suppose, which little devils made a torture to me till I cried with rage, and hated all the world but my mother. Until I grew more able, and read by night and day books which no child should have touched. It ought to have cracked my brain. Then—the third act, from the day I was eighteen to twenty-six, when religious demons tormented me, and got cast out at last, and my chambers were not only swept and garnished, but locked up. Then the consciousness of a certain amount of brains. Why, that’s the seven devils after all!

“And the fourth act I am ending now. It has been a Walpurgis night, a dance of

death, a maniacal, demoniacal rout, of all the virtues and all the vices, who have fought for conquest and precedence in the kingdom of my soul, until they seemed to slay each other in a murder grim and great. And there is nothing, or was nothing, left but a blood-stained hall, with this lame virtue struggling or the other half-stifled vice trying to rear its head. Upon my life I think but two wholly survive, a queer love of Truth and a satyric she-demon. Now cannot a saint bring order into the place? It is a task no mere mortal should attempt. I wonder what the fifth act will be."

He spoke the last words aloud.

"Why it's only the second act yet," said Priscilla. "Doesn't she play well, Mr. Torrington?"

The scene was a garden with some trees, and there stood the persecuted hero, renouncing his lady love without giving a reason, but looking horribly miserable about

it. The acting was certainly good, indeed that particular part was the best in the play. For a while it arrested Torrington's attention, the words of passion appealed to him. But how weak they were ! When the scene was over he turned to Priscilla.

"Do you think he should have done that ?" he asked.

"I don't suppose he could help it," she said, looking up.

"Help it," he exclaimed, loud enough to draw the attention of the people next them, "help it, why I would die sooner than give up a woman if she loved me. Were you ever in love, Priscilla ?" He lowered his voice and spoke very quietly.

She shook her head.

"Never, Mr. Torrington. At least I don't think so. And——" She hesitated then and stopped. A faint colour stole over her face as he looked at her.

"And what ?—nothing I suppose. Well,

well, perhaps, Priscilla, you will be some day. And then you will judge rightly."

By this the girl had recovered her confidence, which his tone had slightly disturbed, and she made a natural enough retort.

"Can you judge rightly?"

"Yes," said Torrington, "but perhaps I mightn't have done a year ago."

"Then you are in love?" she said.

"I can't say, Priscilla, but I will tell you one of these days. It is not a thing to talk of rashly. I know there is and can be nothing greater than love. Though I am rather a scoundrel. As I dare say you have heard."

Priscilla looked up in surprise.

"Who should tell me such a thing, Mr. Torrington? Besides, I don't believe it."

"Thank you, my dear girl," he said, a little moved. "You, at any rate, shall never find me so. Still I am not very good, that's a fact."

She laughed gently.

“Nor am I. Didn’t I tell you the other day that I get into most dreadful tempers? Why, I nearly boxed my sister’s ears this evening.”

“What was that for?” he said, a little absently, for he was thinking of the difference between her goodness and his. She did not answer the question. Yet perhaps it was that which made her turn her attention to the play. He might have given something to fathom her thoughts then, and yet if he had done so he would scarcely have found much in them of value to him as regards himself.

When he left her at her door at a quarter past twelve he walked home fairly satisfied. For one thing he had gained ground with her; she did not resent his slight air of protection nor his affectionate familiarity; she looked at him with very friendly eyes, that was evident, and so far did not think ill of him. He believed that with such a vantage ground he could win her love. But

strangely enough most of his satisfaction arose from the fact that he now knew he was passionately fond of her, and would not draw back from what he had set his mind on. She should be his wife though he courted her for years. The decision was not his but Fate's. It did not seem to have lain in his hands at all, for the past never does. The future has that semblance, and as he walked home he thought he had the power to bend and shake her until she lay in the hollow of his hand. But he was more humble and thankful to whatever gods there were than he had ever been, for there was a promise about her which was sweeter than the possession of any other on the whole earth. A little while ago he might have loved any loving woman in pure desperation, but now, by the quality there is in passion, in her alone lay all the blessings that there were in the world's womanhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NATURAL MAN.

IT is not the lateness of the year itself but its inclemency which sends the artists back in flocks to London, where those who would always work with nature stay disconsolate, like seagulls in inland waters, till the storms of winter are past and done. The autumn is the most beautiful and the most melancholy season of the year; it is the time for vintage and harvest, and the time for labour, since the sun of the summer ripens not only the wheat of the fields but the thoughts of men. Its melancholy is the visible evidence of completion. It suggests the end, and even an abundant accomplishment is not always joyful. But to an artist especially,

the last of the available autumn is the last of the great pleasure of the year.

On the third day after the visit to the theatre the studios were once more occupied by Wynne, Raeburn, and Armour, who returned from North Devon together. Torrington was in his usual afternoon lounge, Gaskell's place, when two cabs drove down the lane and disgorged the three, who looked ruddy and brown with exposure. After a handshake and jovial greeting and a few wholly unnecessary expletives, expressive of joy on his part, he turned to and helped his acquaintances with their easels, canvases, and other luggage, of which there was a great quantity.

"Why didn't you come over to see us?" asked Wynne, as he set down a bag and sat on it in temporary exhaustion. "You are a pretty fellow, after saying you would."

Torrington laughed.

"I didn't want to come over and see all the girls dangling after you. Confound your

handsome face, old man, I should have been jealous, because I love them all myself. Besides, I did very well where I was. I had no rivals."

"If I'd known," declared Wynne, "I would have come over and spoilt the place for you. But what have you been doing?"

"Writing, as usual," replied John, "and a most disagreeable story such as I delight in, where every one is very miserable."

"You won't sell it then?" said Wynne.

"I must," returned the other.

"Why?"

"Because I'm going to get married."

"Fiddlesticks, don't be a fool, Torrington. You can't mean it. Who is she?"

"A dowager duchess, my dear fellow, with ten thousand a year at least."

And then Wynne smiled incredulous of everything. But so did John Torrington.

"He will be surprised, I know," he thought, "and think me a worse fool than ever. But, by heavens! if all the world does,

I don't care. I wouldn't mind shouting it out in the streets, crying it with a bell, or going round with it placarded on sandwich boards, if that would make it certain. Did you do much work?" he added aloud.

Wynne nodded at a lot of canvases.

"And more coming by luggage train. By Jove! I made the rest work. I drove them out to it as if I were a slave-driver."

"Armour too?" asked Torrington.

"No need to drive him. He's a beggar to work at everything he takes up. But there, you lazy devil, make me some tea, I'm tired out."

Torrington made some, and then went. He spoke to Armour, who was standing outside his door, but did not go in. He fancied the artist was a little stiff and cold, which repelled him instantly, though he was reluctant to believe it. Yet he chuckled to himself to think what Armour's wonder would be at the possible news. So he made a remark.

“I saw Miss Morris three days ago, and she looked very well, in spite of sitting again for that exigent, imperious West. He is working at a relief. It is very beautiful.”

“His stuff usually is,” replied Armour.

“With such a model,” said John almost joyously, and then nodded farewell.

Paul looked after him in silence as he went into Raeburn’s, and then muttered, “I wonder if—but no. That’s absurd.” And whatever thought disturbed him fled instantly. He hardly remembered thinking it afterwards.

Though Torrington had shaken hands with Raeburn outside he did it again when he entered the studio, but without speaking, and in a way which was very pleasant to see. Then he rested his hand on his shoulder lightly and twisted him round.

“Ah, those great works of yours, old man; may I?”

George smiled and nodded his consent, so John unstrapped some six canvases and set them up in a row very deliberately. Then he stood back and looked at them critically, saying at intervals, "Hum, hum," in a way which amused Raeburn, but puzzled him too, for with such a vague expression of criticism, coming from a face set in the way Torrington sometimes affected, it was hard to judge whether the effect was favourable or not. Presently John picked out four, put them in another light, and then placed them against the wall.

"I do that because they are good," he remarked at length, "but I don't congratulate you on them."

"Why not?" asked Raeburn, a little impatiently.

"Because I expected you to do good work. But I congratulate you on these."

He turned round smiling.

"And why these again?"

“Because, my dear friend,” said Torrington sententiously, “because they are failures.”

The congratulated one started.

“I don’t follow your reasoning, Torrington.”

“Hum, I dare say not; but I don’t believe in a man who never fails. Constant success is an almost infallible sign of mediocrity. It is true constant failure is no sign of a genius, though some folks think so. Success always, or almost always, spoils an artist. That is usually late in life. Success very early shows he can’t be spoiled, simply because there is nothing in him to spoil. That’s a rule. There are exceptions, I grant, but I never met one personally, and hardly expect to do it. You have been aiming high and have missed. It’s a coarse artistic aphorism, I know, but here’s one for you. It’s much easier to stick a pig than shoot an eagle. But from our point of view a wing feather is better than roast pork even

with apple sauce. Come now, you haven't shot the eagle, but here's a wing feather for you. You never did a better piece of technical work in your life than this square foot!" And he pointed out a piece of "distance" in a landscape.

"Yes?" returned Raeburn, just a little ruefully, "I dare say you are right. But damn it, you see I can easier take your word for its being generally a failure than for that piece being well painted. For what do you really know about painting?"

Torrington shook his head.

"That's always the way with an artist. He must have it all praise. When an outside critic butters him all over, he thinks the outsider's judgment good, but woe to the poor fellow if he even substitutes a commoner kind of grease. Then he knows nothing. I won't argue with you, for you must be tired. No! I'll put them away for you. Don't you trouble."

When he had done so he sat in the low

arm-chair while Raeburn occupied the sofa, and there was silence for a while—that kind of silence which shows that men are friends better than any words. For George was thinking how much truth there might be in Torrington's discourse, while he, for his part, was wondering whether he could tell the other what strange revolutions were impending in his life.

“But I suppose I had better not. There is no need to say anything explicit or particular until I know. Perhaps Priscilla mightn't like it to come out for a while even if she does say yes.”

That was his thought on the subject, but, though he kept to his resolution, the train of ideas he followed led to his next remark.

“How do you like living alone, George?”
Raeburn looked at him quietly.

“I think you have asked me before, my friend. There is no need to answer it. I am too poor not to be solitary.”

“Yes, that's it,” assented Torrington,

“but it’s very hard. To put it negatively and absurdly, it’s very hard not to be not a bachelor. I told a lady so the other day, and she agreed. I should find it hard to get any one to share my present privations who was of my own class.”

“What is your class, pray?” said Raeburn.

“Well, then, of a corresponding degree of education. I shall have to put up with that though. I don’t care anyhow, it would puzzle seventy-seven of the wisest men to pick out a wife suitable for me. I am going to suit myself as far as I can. Look here——”

He jumped and got excited instantly, just as water heated under pressure bursts into vapour when the boiler yields. Raeburn, who knew his tricks, took no notice.

“Yes, look here. I’m sick of being alone, sick of it. To put it on the lowest grounds, I spend three-quarters of my time looking after myself. And I ought to be working

instead. Then I tell you there is but one heaven for me, and it is woman's love. It sounds nonsense in cold blood, but I'm never in cold blood, never was, and never shall be, until I'm dead and frozen the winter after. I tell you I have been hunting for her for years. Sometimes I thought I had found her; but it was a mistake. For a time the delusion was sweet, very sweet. but it was bitter afterwards. Perhaps it was my fault. Heaven knows, I have enough to furnish a whole family with; no one knows that so well as myself (bar Heaven, as I remarked before), yet the fact remains. But I can't live alone, and I have to do it, or it seems so, or did seem so. I live in perpetual folly, and run about gassing to this or that one, making love in a kind of bitter burlesque. An old friend of mine (you never knew him, but he's a doctor) says I look at things out of focus. Well, I can't get in focus, and never shall till I settle down. Why, for one

thing, I love children, and would give anything to have one of my own. Few bachelors would say so much, even if they thought it. I believe the fools think it unmanly to desire to have offspring. But men—men don't; and I am a natural man in infernally unnatural surroundings. I am going to put an end to it somehow. I tell you it's this life which makes me so cursedly analytic. I always have myself on the dissecting table, and take a morbid delight in seeing my own quivering nerves. I had better take to using the scalpel on my own leg, or do as a doctor did once, inoculate myself with hydrophobia for the sake of science. Paul Bourget says observation is no good for writing books, and that experience is everything. I say curse experience, if it only means suffering. Should I go on writing I have had enough of that to do a score of books. Now I am ready to try a little happiness, just by way of a change of air and scene. I know what it means; I

have had it just for a moment now and again; but the glimpses of heaven the Peri got when the gate opened were rather maddening I should fancy. Besides, happiness coming that way, just for an hour, breeds a kind of indigestion. A starving beggar might be bilious if he sat down with the Lord Mayor to turtle soup. One should work up to delight slowly and stay with it. I'm going to change things. For, Raeburn, to tell you the truth, I think I'm going to get married."

He stopped in front of his friend, with flashing eyes and heaving breast, for he was greatly moved.

Raeburn sat up.

"My dear fellow, if you can do it wisely, I shall be glad."

Torrington burst out at him.

"Wisely, wisely," he shouted scornfully, bringing his clenched fist down on the table, till the cups and saucers which stood there rattled, "confound wisdom! I have been

cautious all my life in a kind of way, and now I'll take a chance. I think it would be the wisest act of folly I ever did in my life to get married. It would force me out of myself; I should have to think of some one else. I could make three times what I do, I know it, and that would be quite enough for us."

"Who is she then?" asked Raeburn.

"She's a very beautiful girl. I love beauty, and always shall; and a very poor girl too, which is a blessing, I'm sure, or I should never have dared to think of it, and as pure and sweet a girl as ever walked this cruel crowded world. And I'm bad enough to know what purity is worth. I'm going to marry her if she'll have me, and I think she will."

"Then it's not settled?" asked the other.

"No, it's not, but I hope it soon will be. I will tell you as soon as it is, you may rely on it. And I'll introduce her to you." And he laughed.

“What, you’re laughing are you?” cried George. “Well, I’ve known you some time, but I shall never quite understand you.”

“Oh yes, you will,” returned Torrington, who having blown off the steam became once more like an ordinary individual who was not in revolt, “for then I shall be saner every day.”

“Which is quite necessary,” said George drily, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, “for you seem to get a little madder day by day now.”

“I dare say,” said John. “I do well to get mad.”

Then he quoted :

“He left the little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad,
To show by one satiric touch
No nation needed it so much.”

“I have some Irish blood in my veins.
So if I don’t shoot my fair white dove and
bring her to my breast, I’ll go over to

Dublin and take advantage of the great Dean's bequest."

He took up his hat and held out his hand.

"Poor dear old George Raeburn, I'm sorry I've been so violent. Come round to my den this evening and I'll see if I can't get some whisky in. I promise not to talk more than nineteen to the dozen if you do."

"I won't promise," said his friend, "but perhaps I will come in about half-past ten or so. And as to your talking, I don't mind that if it's only nine-tenths twaddle. A tenth good sense will save you."

"Hum," said Torrington. "You are rather hard on ordinary conversationalists then. Still, every good talker talks mostly nonsense. That's a parallel to your failures, old man. Good-bye!"

He went away smiling without thinking how good it was of Raeburn to listen so patiently. But then George knew it was better than medicine to let Torrington

ease his bosom of such perilous stuff, and exercised his charity as well as his self-restraint. But perhaps he smiled a little sadly as he looked round his studio and saw how very solitary it was.

CHAPTER IX.

HER PROMISED VISIT.

It becomes evident to me as I write that my friend Torrington's mind was a little disordered, or that, if it was not disordered in the common sense of the word, it went in curious and erratic curves, which from any but a far standpoint seemed to have neither a common force nor a common centre. Once he had a strange glimpse of the truth, which came to him from his love of analogies, and he seemed to see clearly that life for him was founded on a wrong scheme, or conceived as a far too complex system.

"I tell you," he once said to me emphatically. "I am so far only a kind of Ptolemy. I make myself the centre of the

solar system of humanity, and can't get beyond it. Perhaps finally I shall be a Galileo, and see that I revolve round some great centre. Doubtless, part of me will revolt; perhaps I shall be clapped in the Inquisition and even recant. But whether I shall ever get to my Newtonian time and recognise a principle, a cause, as well as a scheme, I can't say. Probably not. At present I am a Cartesian, and believe in vortices. But I am in a whirlpool myself, a straw in it, an unconsidered chip. Nevertheless in my egoism, you, my friend, are but a vision of my own, a dream, a bundle of pleasing sensations. Do you follow?"

That was the last time I talked with him before going to Italy, where I was during the remainder of this story. I shook my head as I looked round his room, which I was to see under altered circumstances.

Torrington's room was indeed characteristic of him, full as it was of strange evidences. It was large, low, and square, with

two windows looking out upon a dingy street, wherein a crowd of noisy young ruffians were usually at uproarious play, even to eleven o'clock at night. It was carpeted with a square of greyish stuff, not wholly devoid of holes, and even to the eye dusty. The rug before the fireplace was mostly covered with scraps of paper and crumbs, while the fireplace itself was rusted and rarely black. Underneath the grate a week's accumulation of ashes was no uncommon sight for the rare visitor, who was naturally seldom so fastidious as to object. The mantelpiece was laden with piles of books, set on their sides, and running up from a quarto or large octavo classic to a diminutive duodecimo *Tatler*, while the interspaces between these were filled up with tied bundles of letters and odd documents of all sorts. Crowning the book building was a varied collection of photographs, which he changed at intervals, when he got tired of being stared out of counte-

nance by any particular set. Above these again, hanged, or nailed, or pinned to the wall, were oil paintings, water-colour drawings, odd etchings, and woodcuts, some being by Raeburn, Gaskell, and other men whom he knew, while others were collected out of art magazines, to be preserved from obscurity for a while in order to be more certainly doomed to destruction.

But the large round table, however, by the far corner was the most noticeable thing in the room. It arrogated to itself the same inevitable position of importance that Armour's etching-table did in his studio, and drew the eye towards it, not only by its size, which was out of proportion with the room, but by the extraordinary heterogeneity of its varied collections. In the middle was a long row of books set upon their edges, for a convenience of reference which was rendered nugatory by a superimposed pile of papers, manuscript paper, large and small envelopes, French novels (including volumes

of Gautier, Maupassant, and his favourites Balzac and Daudet), English novels (in which his taste was fairly catholic), and a large quantity of magazines, some of which contained articles by himself. On the far side of this middle barrier was a *terra incognita*, or no man's land, where hats, gloves, cuffs, drawing and sketching materials, old razors and brushes, and a huge bundle of letters, lay heaped in such dire confusion, that he hardly knew where anything might or indeed might not be found; while on its near side his more recent manuscripts were piled portentously threatening the small space left vacant for his lamp, ink-pot, and half-a-dozen pipes, which he for ever smoked when working. The rest of the room was not out of keeping with the part here described, for on every wall hung pictures and sketches of a greater or less degree of merit, and there was not a corner in it which was not very dusty, save for a week, perhaps, after those rare occasions

when some signs of grace in the man, or the threatening and amused importunity of his landlady, allowed or procured the temporary cleansing of his solitary den.

Torrington had not left Priscilla at her door on the night he had taken her to the theatre without extracting a promise from her to come round and see him on the following Wednesday. This promise was by no means given readily or without much persuasion, but when he had once received it he knew well that it would not be broken without cause or necessity. On the Wednesday morning he made an effort to place his room in some kind of decency, so that there might be no more disorder in it than would suffice to amuse without quite shocking her.

“Bless her feminine heart,” he said, smiling, as he desisted, “perhaps the sight of so much misery, the sight of a man coping with such matters as dust, will arouse her sympathies and make her more ready to

assist. Who knows? There are many avenues to the Temple of Love."

In order to give her no excuse he had sent her a note reminding her of her promise, and was glad to receive no answer, lest it might have been to defer the visit. He came in about half-past six, and after lighting the lamp and the fire, placed some chrysanthemums, which he had just purchased, in water on his table, and then sat down to wait in a growing fever of impatience and apprehension. For he was so ready to torment himself the moment he was without some visible task. Yet withal he was sure of her, sure that his love would win hers in return.

It was twenty minutes past seven ere he heard a knock which he took to be hers, so faint a one indeed, that if he had not left his own door open, for fear of some one keeping her waiting, he would not have caught it. He sprang up with a beating heart, ran down stairs eagerly, and opened to her.

“Saint Priscilla,” he murmured, as his face lighted up, for it was indeed she who stood there a little timidly, as though she doubted her wisdom. She had stayed once or twice on her way thither, and might very easily have been ten minutes earlier. But now she smiled as she stepped into the narrow, ill-lighted hall, for the expression on his face was one of pure gladness, and no one would have credited the man with evil.

“You are late, my dear girl,” he said lightly. “I began to think it was only a false dream which whispered to me that you would come.”

“I could hardly help it, Mr. Torrington,” she said, as she followed him up the stairs, “for I was a little late coming home.”

“Well, I regret nothing now you have come, Priscilla. See, this is my den.”

She entered and looked round her curiously, for her artistic perceptions were true and intense. It was evident the place, poor as it was, pleased her, and she said so.

“I see you are fond of colour Mr. Torrington, and you have good taste too.”

“Yes, for a mere man,” remarked John joyously; he was so glad to see her there. “I love colour, and like it stronger every day. It grows on me, and a Japanese fan or a bit of beautiful drapery is like a chord of music or a versé of true rhythm. I like to believe that I love all beauty, all there is in the world. I wish I hated evil as truly. Take your hat and cloak off, Priscilla, you have come to stay for a while I know.”

“I can’t stay for long, Mr. Torrington,” she said a little shyly, not wishing him to think that she was too glad or too ready to remain. His face grew instantly downcast, for it was a very mirror for his sudden changes.

“Ah, Saint Priscilla, you are cruel. Nay, I don’t believe you quite mean it. At any rate uncloak, and let me think you will stay. I am always ready to deceive myself.”

With a gentle insistence he took off her cloak.

“Why, your hair is down and quite loose. I never knew you wore it so.” He touched it very lightly with his fingers, and lifting one tress out of its abundance put it reverently to his lips. But she did not know that he did so.

“I washed it just now, Mr. Torrington, for I have to sit to-morrow with it loose, and they wanted it fluffy.”

He felt a little injured that “they” had any such power over her. He offered her the canvas lounge, and she sat down on the right-hand side of the fire, while he drew his working chair from the table and placed it nearer hers. At that moment a surge of blood ran up into his brain and made him tremble. For she was really sitting there by his fire. She whom he loved. How strange it was and how very sweet. Others had sat there too, but no Saint Priscilla.

She was dressed in a very simple frock of

a colour resembling terra-cotta, which just showed her slight and girlish figure, and round her slender neck and wrists was some yellowish lace. She bent forward just a little and looked very gravely and simply at the fire, which flickered pleasantly and illumined the room quite as much as the lamp, which stood on the table covered with a green shade. For a moment both kept silence—she, because just then she had little to say, and was merely content that Torrington was glad to see her; he, because he was at a loss to choose from his thoughts, and was without the impulse which might have rendered a choice impossible. For he restrained himself, wondering all the time how long he would be able to do it. But he did speak at last, for he desired she should not note the flight of time.

“It is very pleasant to see you here—very. For I lead a very lonely life, Priscilla, except when I am out in the busy world. And I don’t like loneliness, do you?”

She looked up to him and smiled.

“Not always, Mr. Torrington, but then I am busy, and have so much to do——

“Not only for yourself though,” interjected John.

“Besides, my sister lives with me, and then I read.”

“Ah ! you do read, eh ? ” said he eagerly, for he was naturally anxious to see what her culture was in that direction. “What do you read ? ”

“Not very much,” she laughed ; “ usually novels, and sometimes a little poetry.” Torrington sighed gratefully, for did he not write such stuff himself ? “ And Mr. Armour often reads poetry to me. For he likes it very much.”

“ Can you play the piano ? ”

She shook her head, but then broke out eagerly :

“ No, but I am trying to, and I think I shall. For, oh ! I love music.”

Would not a lover thank heaven for that ?

“Then, Priscilla, you shall hear a lot of it if you are good. I will take you to the popular concerts if you would like to go.”

She looked up almost reproachfully.

“Would I like to go! But it is very good of you.”

“No,” said Torrington, “I don’t think it is good of me. I am not good at all. But I love to see any one enjoy anything which is good, whether it is music or a dinner. If I were rich I would make a point of giving a dinner every day to some poor devil who was hungry. On the same principle, which is a selfish one, I should like to see you listening to something you enjoyed. That was one of my pleasures the other night at the theatre. I told you it took two to go to one, didn’t I? and to select a companion for a concert or a play is a very serious matter. As serious for the time being as marriage, though, to be sure, many people who are married don’t seem to enjoy

taking their partners with them when they go to such entertainments."

He laughed a little and then was silent, thinking how he should direct the conversation. For he was talking with entire self-consciousness, and took a certain pleasure in walking on the thin division line between ordinary chatter and that lovemaking which is not direct and acknowledged, but consists perhaps more in manner than matter, in pauses than in speech.

"Ah! so you love poetry, do you, Priscilla? I am glad of that—very glad. Do you know why?"

"No, Mr. Torrington," she answered simply.

"Well," he said, "I am reputed by certain kind folks to be capable of such myself. I write verse every now and again."

"What," she said, "do you mean you are a poet?"

"Hum, my dear girl, don't ask me to commit myself to such a statement. A

verse-writer is not necessarily a poet, or the breed wouldn't be so scarce. Yet sometimes I fancy I am. Now, for instance, as I see you sitting here in my solitary room, by my fire, just as if it were a home. For it takes two at least to make a home. A palace may be a mere den with a solitary prince in it. You see, it is like a theatre again. But that makes me feel as if I were one. I should be glad to do such work always. But then there's no money in it, Priscilla, and money is unhappily very necessary these times. If one didn't find a pleasure in work by itself it would be hard. What are the two great things in life, fair saint ? ”

She glanced at him, and then looked into the fire.

“ I suppose one is work,” she hesitated.

“ And the other ? ”

“ I don't know.”

“ Nonsense, Priscilla, you must know that. You are not so divorced of earth after all. Come, now, tell me.”

He now bent towards her and spoke tenderly, almost musically. Without looking up this time she answered :

“ I suppose you mean love, Mr. Torrington.”

“ Good child,” he said softly, “ of course, of course. My religion is a strange heterodoxy, and I worship in the church of Love and Labour. Do you know your voice is a very sweet one, Priscilla ? You say you are learning to play ; are you learning to sing as well ? ”

She shook her head a trifle mournfully, and looked at him now as she spoke.

“ No, I can't afford the time, or the money, or anything else. Besides, I didn't know my voice was sweet.”

“ Ah, but it is,” he insisted, “ and you should learn to be a Saint Cecilia as well as a Saint Priscilla. Fancy yourself playing at the organ great strains of harmony with the thunder of it in some deep-aisled church, while the sunlight pours down on you, gold and red and purple, through stained glass.

Ah ! if I could but play the organ ! It is the instrument of the soul."

He stayed his speech for a moment, for his thoughts ran away with him into the silence which was the best expression. Priscilla did not quite understand him, but it was pleasant to hear the man talk, for she knew no one who spoke in that way. She felt it was a kind of flattery that he should do so in her company. For every now and again it flashed upon her how little she knew, and how hard it was to express what she felt, save indeed in loving service, the glance of the eye, and the pressure of the hand. Perhaps their thoughts ran together in sympathy, for his next remark suggested it.

"How hard it is to say what one means and feels, Priscilla. Perhaps when one can the hour is not at hand. But there, that doesn't worry you quite as it does me. If you had to write some loathsome article for a newspaper when you felt like lying in the sun, you would know what I mean."

“I think I feel that, Mr. Torrington,” said she eagerly. “Sometimes I want to say things and can’t. And as to writing a letter, or at least a long one, it worries me to death. All mine are short. I wish I could write heaps and do it as easily as you.”

Torrington laughed, and patted her shoulder very lightly.

“Be content, my dear girl, with your own burdens, without longing for others.” She suddenly turned grave. “For I suppose you have some, like the rest of us—eh?”

“I suppose so, Mr. Torrington.”

“But never mind, Priscilla, if you have. That makes you a mortal; and anyhow, mortal or not, you look good enough to make me feel good myself. Why, if I sat and looked at you for a few hours I believe I should gratify some I know by becoming orthodox.”

Just then the nearest church clock struck nine, and in order to prevent her hearing it,

and thus have an excuse for going, he jumped up rather noisily.

“Well, on my soul I am a lively one, too. You will think I am a preacher to be sermonising so. It is disgraceful of me when I ought to entertain you.”

“You do entertain me very much.”

“No mockery, young woman; I won’t have it. What shall I do now? If I wanted to prevent you ever coming here again I would volunteer to read you a chapter out of an unpublished novel; but I don’t. Come now, you shall have some tea.”

She protested feebly and finally acquiesced, sinking back into the chair from which she had attempted to rise.

“Tea is good any time and anywhere. It is the only good thing the Chinese ever did.”

He went on chattering volubly as he boiled the water in a dilapidated kettle which leaked, and got out the tea-things, which were also in no very fine state of repair. Tea, with some bread, butter, and

marmalade, was soon on the table, which he cleared by the summary eviction of books and papers which went on the floor in a pile, and they sat down. Torrington was in a very happy frame of mind. She had meant to go away soon after a merely perfunctory visit, and he had persuaded her to stay. Surely this was in his favour. His hopes rose high. He was almost inclined to forget that her taking tea and talking with some man was naturally an almost every-day occurrence in her life as she followed her vocation, and was ready to base hopes on it. Soon he was on the very verge of speaking to her seriously, and had to check himself. There was no need to hurry, and time was in his favour.

When tea was over he restored the cups and other things to his cupboard in their unwashed state, remarking merrily that he was a miserable wretch to have to do so.

“No, no,” he said, when she offered to wash them then and there, “I won’t allow

it. You are my guest, my angel, who has folded her wings here for a while, my saint who has been graciously pleased to occupy this sordid niche for an hour, and I won't allow you to do anything for me except look kind and sweet. But here, let me do something for you."

"What's that?" she asked, wondering what his next flight of imagination was going to lead him to.

"What is it? Ah, well. I know it's very daring of me, but I should like to plait your hair, if you don't mind."

"Oh, no, Mr. Torrington, I don't think there's any need of that. I can do it myself in a moment."

"That's not the point," insisted John; "of course you can. The thing is, I want to do it. I have just taken the fit. Besides, can you plait in four?"

"No, I can't do that. Can you?" she asked. For if she was going to learn so much of a mystery, there was no harm in

allowing him a little pleasure, if it really did please him. It evidently did, for he immediately began to descant on the advantages of the four plait, and to boast of the dexterity in such matters which he had acquired on board ship some years ago, and placing a chair for her, she sat down.

Her hair was very long and abundant, and delighted John above measure. For one thing a woman's hair was one of the most beautiful things in nature, and he almost worshipped it. But these were the tresses of the girl he meant to make his wife, and whom he was now courting in this strange manner. It made him feel almost faint to touch it, and he handled it very reverently. To do him justice, it was not in him to have done otherwise, for though Torrington was not a very good man according to any creed or code of morality, he would have deemed himself shamed for ever if he had dared to take any kind of liberty with a young girl who trusted him. As

well might one wring the neck of some fair white dove which forgot for a moment its terror of man and perched upon one's hand or shoulder. He remembered the sonnet in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, where the woman sat and some one caught her by the locks from behind. She asked who it might be—"Was it not Death?" "Nay, it is not Death, but Love." This was the woman, and he—he was Love, the strong and gentle and the reverent. For he felt blessed with her there, blessed and lifted for once out of the darker realms of the lower passions, divorced from the brutish part of his soul and made spiritual with eyes which could recognise purity when they saw it, and hands which should touch its possessor almost with fear and trembling. So he was silent until he had finished the plait, though he did dare to put it to his lips when it was done. And then as she talked, and the suggestions of Death and Love passed from his mind, he became more his ordinary

self, and laughed with her again. For his moods changed like the patterns of a kaleidoscope.

“Well, Priscilla, what am I to have for teaching you this new mystery, which, by the way, you will most surely forget, for let me tell you, highly as I reverence women, it is but few that can reach the plait in four, and as to those who can do one in five, there are as many feminine Greek professors. But what is to be my reward?”

She looked a little alarmed, for to tell the truth he spoke with a tenderness which was akin to passion. However her answer was good.

“I think being allowed to do it was enough, Mr. Torrington.”

“Nay,” he answered, “if it had been a plait in three it would, but I want to be rewarded for my teaching. Will you not give me a kiss, Priscilla?”

He went towards her, for she had managed to put a yard or two of space in between

them, and held out his hand. She laughed a little, but not in a yielding way.

“I think not, Mr. Torrington.”

“Then I must take it,” he said gaily, but suddenly altered his tone. “No, I won’t, Priscilla, it would be very unkind and rude of me. When you go you must let me kiss your hand. Come, sit down again, there is no hurry now. You and I have no fierce masters or mistresses to bully us as to times and seasons of getting in.”

“I am not sure I don’t have fierce masters,” retorted Priscilla. “If you had to sit for a living you would find that out.”

“Ah,” he remarked rather significantly, “Saint Priscilla won’t always be at that. It is not fit for you. You ought to be in a window. Then I would go to church, my dear girl, and see you sometimes. But there, I’m always talking nonsense; you look a great deal nicer here than you would there. If you were here this would be my

church, and you should look on while I wrote."

"I expect it would not be always looking on," said the girl, "there would be the tea-things. I always am at tea-things wherever I go. The artists always say, 'There's a dear, do make tea, you do it so nicely.' And of course I have to. Not that I mind it, for a I hate a man to get tea. He does it so clumsily and looks like a fish out of water."

"So he is," replied Torrington. "You had better make a point of coming round here at five and making mine."

"I dare say," said Priscilla, and there was silence again, which Torrington did not break for some minutes, as he gazed into the fire intently, almost oblivious of her being there, although her presence lent his mood its earnestness and gave it its direction. For he mused for a moment.

"How strange it is," he thought, "that this pure and innocent girl, should be here,

and with me. But is it not stranger still that I should be so pure and innocent myself now? It is because she does not yet love me. If she only knew all I know, aye, half I know of myself, she would be horror-stricken. I wonder whether most men are as bad and as good as I am. Half devil, half god, eagle and swine, clay and gold. That's a kind of heraldic bearing. And the motto, 'Between heaven and hell.' I ought to be thankful (though I don't know exactly to whom) that I have such a chance of redemption as I have. If this dear girl will marry me, I will turn over a new leaf and be virtuous. After all, the copy-books we sneer at are not so far wrong. It has taken me nearly thirty years to find that out. There is something in morality after all. I have made a great discovery, quite new to me, though I have read Aristotle and Plato and the others. How strange this simple-hearted girl, who is nothing but pure and fair and affectionate,

with a warm heart and a tender one, should teach me more than I ever knew. Yet it's not strange after all. For all the books of the wisdom of heaven and hell are within a woman's heart."

"Why, how silent you are, Mr. Torrington," said the subject of his thoughts.

"Aye," he said quietly. "I was thinking about different things. One day, perhaps, I will tell you what they were. For, though you may think it strange, you were in them."

"Oh, was I?" she smiled innocently; "then you ought to tell me. You shall have a penny for your thoughts."

"Ah, Priscilla," said he a little solemnly, "they are either worth nothing or all the treasures of Solomon. But perhaps I will make you a present of them some day. Yes, some day, to Saint Priscilla, who was good and kind to me, for she came to see me when I was alone and solitary and unhappy, and who will take a great deal of the light away when she goes."

"I think," said she, rising, "it is more than time I went now, for hark, that must be eleven striking."

"I believe it is, truly," said John. "I wish I had the courage to be a liar and tell you it was to the best of my knowledge and belief no more than nine, but what with my talking and our fits of silence the evening has gone like the wind. I will come with you and see you home."

When they reached the street it was solitary and deserted, although the night was fairly fine overhead. Yet the wind blew keenly, and Torrington shivered as it struck him. His first thought was for her, however.

"I hope you are warmly dressed, dear," he said, with kind solicitude. "What a vile climate this is! How should you like to see Italy?"

Her arm was within his, and he felt it quiver a little. He knew the reason when she spoke, for she did so in a curiously

intense voice, full of a suppressed longing which was almost emotion.

“I have dreamed of it, Mr. Torrington, oh! I have dreamed of it. And when the different artists have shown me their sketches done there, and talked about the country, it has made me wild to go. Oh! I would do anything to go there, I really think.”

“Ah!” said John to himself, “I have certainly struck a more responsive chord than I have touched all the evening. That may be useful. Well, Priscilla,” he added aloud, “who knows, you may go there. I have been there myself, but, strangely enough, not to Florence and Venice, the places I most desire to see. Who knows? Why, perhaps we might meet there some day. Then we should be in Italy together.”

He thought that was very clever, but Priscilla did not see the meaning he put into the words, for she was picturing to herself the visible aspect of the country, its great churches and strange people. Besides,

there was another thought in her mind, one which was not sweet, which indeed had been very much the reverse, though it seemed now to gradually lose its bitterness, that cast a certain dark shadow even across her vividly pictured scenes of Italy. Instinctively she loosed her hand from Torrington's arm. Yet he did not notice it as they stood before her house, which was utterly dark and silent. Only across the way the hammers were yet at work with their unpleasing suggestions.

"Well, good-bye, Priscilla, good-bye, and you will come again?"

"Oh! I don't know about that," she said a little coquettishly.

"Then if you don't I shall think you have been very dull all the evening. Say you will come, dear saint; now don't be cruel."

She hesitated a moment, and then putting out her hand said:

"Very well, I will then. But not before

next week. No, not before then. Good night."

He watched the door close, and then regretted he had not asked her to let him kiss her, and not her hand, this time. But perhaps it was as well. He waited till he saw a light in her room, and then with an inaudible blessing upon her sweet face he went home to his solitude with a growing joy and certainty in his heart.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL AND MARY.

THE melancholy which tinged the whole being of Mary or Priscilla Morris was due not only, perhaps, to some tendencies inherited from her mother, who had been as beautiful as her daughter and of as rare a type, but to the hard and cruel circumstances in which her lot had been cast for some years before this part of her story began. Her mother she barely remembered ; her stepmother had been, if not actively unkind, at least stern and cold, even while the father lived, and when he disappeared out of their lives, the want of sympathy between two entirely opposite natures became so manifest that Mary left a home which no longer seemed like home

to her, and sought a temporary refuge with her aunt. Yet here was poverty of a sordid kind, and it was impossible for her to be a burden on those who were assuredly only induced to receive her at all by the desire not to appear selfish or unkind. For she soon saw that there was no real wish to heartily befriend or to shelter her from the world with which she appeared so dangerously and delicately unable to cope, and that it was necessary for her to earn her living, even though the struggle to do so was rendered almost impossible by the very urgency of her need.

For needlework she had some aptitude, but fortunately she did not possess sufficient strength to enter on a business the confinement of which would have assuredly ruined her constitution and probably have killed her in the end. When she was fairly worn out and heartbroken with her efforts to obtain anything, however humble, which might satisfy her small needs, she came

across an acquaintance whom she had not met for some years. Amy Smith appeared in flourishing circumstances. She was well dressed and well gloved ; the slovenly boots she once wore had disappeared ; she was healthy looking, and showed no signs of toil or weariness. Yet that she was without any business her friend well knew. Mary confided her trouble to this girl, who did not readily impart her own affairs in return, and it was only when she saw the distress in which the other was that she revealed the secret of her apparent success in life. She was an artist's model.

There is among many people a prejudice against such a calling, and, perhaps, seeing the dangers which undoubtedly beset a girl who takes it up, the prejudice is not without a basis. Yet she that "will to Cupar maun to Cupar," and the woman who loses her character for modesty in a studio in other circumstances might have equally well spoilt her reputation in the street.

There are, as any one who is acquainted with the details of the artist's life is well aware, many girls earning their living in this way who are as pure and delicate-minded as those living quietly beyond danger in a secluded home. Mary, however, knew nothing either for or against such a mode of obtaining a livelihood, and made inquiries almost eagerly of Amy, who having once broken the ice of her diffidence was voluble with information.

"You see, my dear," she said with the superior smile of one who teaches ignorance, "that it is a business easy enough to learn. It is hard enough, to be sure, sitting or standing just so, or just so, for hours a day. And then at first one doesn't like to be stared at by a lot of men or girls if one sits to a school. But you would soon get used to it. You wouldn't like to sit for the figure, I suppose? But no, I don't suppose you would."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary, to

whom this was unintelligible jargon. The other girl laughed.

“I mean sit for a picture without any clothes.”

“Of course not,” cried the other in indignation. “You don’t mean there are girls who do?”

“Don’t I? Yes, indeed, I do; and after all, why not? It would be nothing when you got used to it. Though, to be sure, I never cared about it.”

As a matter of fact Amy had never been asked, or the superior pay might very well have induced her to put aside her scruples. But then her figure was evidently not good, though her face was pretty.

“And,” went on Amy, “I can usually make a pound a week. Sometimes it is less and sometimes more. But one can get along on so much.”

“I should think so,” sighed Mary, to whom the sum named seemed in her poverty immense riches.

“They pay me nearly always eighteen-pence for an hour, and for the whole day it is sometimes seven and sixpence. Then if I sit for an artist he gives me lunch. And I tell you it is often great fun. They are very nice fellows, some of them.”

Here she laughed a little coarsely, but without Mary noticing it. Had she not tried so hard, and in vain? Why should she not try this?

“But how does one get such work, Amy?” she inquired.

“By asking for it, and by keeping on asking. You must go round to the studios and ask if they want a model. You must go to the schools and ask there. Then, if any of the artists or masters take a fancy to you, they will give it you. You must leave your address, and perhaps they will write if they remember you. Do you think you would like it?”

Mary looked up doubtfully.

“I’m sure I don’t know, but I must do

something. Where do you live? May I come round and see you, and have another talk?"

"Of course you may," said Amy, "any time you like. I am often in after dark."

She gave Mary her address, and went off to a sitting at Lambeth School.

This was the beginning of a new life to the girl, for during the following week she made her *début* as a model. It was a most bitter and trying ordeal to her. Many a time during her first sitting she was tempted to rise and implore the artist to allow her to go away, for she felt so shame-faced at being stared at so persistently. Then the demands on her strength were so considerable that she often felt overtaxed, for though it seems easy to sit or stand in the same position for a time, the most natural posture becomes irritating and painful at the end of a few minutes. The body in nature is never quite still; though its motions be almost imperceptible, they are

yet motions, and as such are detected in a moment by the trained eye of the artist, as he says, "No, a little higher," or "A little to the left again," when the sitter has no notion that the pose has been varied in the slightest degree. Then some who employ these girls are so exigent; for, wrapped up in the desire for work and their artistic aims, they become forgetful of the humanity of their models, and, treating them like plaster casts, are unkind, not from brutality, but from want of thought. Yet few indeed could be unkind or thoughtless whom Mary Morris sat for, since those whose right and pleasure it is to see and value outward beauty are seldom void of the instinct which makes them recognise the correlated loveliness of the soul.

Yet—and here is drawn the bitter dividing line between such men and those of the lower order of sightless humanity—it is doubtful whether those who composed her home ever saw, even in rare glimpses, her

mere outward loveliness. It was the story of the ugly duckling over again; this fair young swan moved on the turbid waters of a shallow pond, whose natural destiny should have been deep calm lakes and the streams which run under the shadow of lofty trees; who should have been ministered to with offerings of sunlight by the nature which she made more lovely, while all things that shocked should have been withdrawn from her and hidden for ever.

For her life at home, in such a home, grew unendurable. So at last she left it with her sister, and strove to make her way by herself, although, when the step was once taken, she missed even those miserable walls and sordid rooms which had been in some sort a shelter from the cold inclemency of the outer world.

For a time things went well with her, and she was fairly content. Sitings were not un plentiful, and people were, as far as lay in their power, very kind to her. She

got to know Mr. West, and by-and-by Wynne and Raeburn, all of whom occasionally employed her. During this time she met Armour in Raeburn's studio, and once or twice had tea with him by invitation, although he rarely used models himself. She learnt to like this grave, kind man, who was as strong and steadfast as a protecting rock in the troubled sea of life which beat about her. Sometimes, though she never consciously phrased it so, she felt his studio was a kind of haven. For one thing, he would not have asked her there if he had not liked her, and it is so very pleasant to be looked at kindly when one is unhappy. And then hard days came again.

It was summer time. After the Academy was opened, the artists were many of them out of town in the pleasant sunlight which was tempered by a wind from the sea, while she was obliged to remain in the intolerable London which grows worse and worse daily, until in August it becomes a dusty, dreadful

Inferno. Other artists whom she relied on were either idle or employing other girls; her stock, her little stock, of money dwindled as her fears grew; she rose early and went to bed wearied, to drop asleep weeping without hope. Life presented itself to her in its most pitiless aspect. The world was a machine which had caught her by the hair, and would slowly or quickly crush the life out of her. No one cared for her sufficiently to lift a hand to help her, for every one was so dreadfully, so earnestly busy in pleasure, or in a like task of almost impossible salvation. And she was so weak, so unable, so lacking in cunning, in ability, in anything which could, by giving confidence and self-reliance, lift her to a higher plane. Alas, too, she was proud, and that is a heavy handicap to one who is poor. She should have prayed for a frontlet, a very crown of brass, to push her way among her equals, for the weakest goes to the wall and is crushed, be it soon or be it late.

Yet she could not die, and she was compelled to return once more to her aunt's house. Oh, the intolerable shame of it, to have to go back beaten, not to kind folks who would have tended her wounded soul with sympathy and kissed her bruised heart with tender lips, but to those who were only too ready to actually pinch themselves in their real poverty that they might have the right of reproach and caustic comment.

During the summer months she moved like a ghost about the house, doing all that lay in her power, and often enough what would have been beyond it, save for her power of subdued passion. Upon her lips she set a seal and spoke but seldom, never answering any of the taunts which wounded her tender spirit, though she despised those who were so brutal as to make them. Often enough she was so far moved that, but for her sister, she would have shaken the very dust of the dwelling from her feet, and gone forth to meet whatever Fate might have

had in store for her, but for the younger girl's sake she held her peace and did not stir. Yet she waned visibly, and grew pale and thin. The food she ate was poor and innutritious, she did not get from it what a coarser organisation might have, and the air of a close quarter in Blackfriars was very poison to her lungs. At times she felt it could not last for long, and was glad, in a curious cold way, at the very thought of death, for then she would be alone, and in a quiet which was here denied her. For she might not even weep at night, seeing that her cousin, who bore her no good-will, slept in the same room with her, and would doubtless have been only too glad to bear to her mother such convincing evidence of the discontent with which she was perpetually charged. It is a fearful sign of the degradation into which the lower classes have fallen that they can thus denounce the only thing in the world which may or shall have power to lift them from

the mire into which they have been trodden. For to them Discontent should be divine, and daily nourished with offerings as though she were a goddess. It was indeed well for Mary that she was not as they would have had her.

She would not have lived even so without the hope which a fervent spirit never wholly loses, and suddenly a light broke in upon her. Wynne, who was now master in a school of art, wrote offering a long series of sittings, and a few days afterwards came an independent letter from another artist who had a school of his own. What she could earn during the next few weeks would far more than keep both the sisters, and Alice, the younger, could seek employment for herself. The very next day after the arrival of the second letter she left Blackfriars for good, determined in no case ever to return there. Her aunt was perhaps not loth to lose her, though little that was of the outside world concerned a woman who was

hysterical and full of vague superstitious fancies. She herself had never been actively unkind to Mary, it was the bitter dependence that seemed so cruel, and what was said on her departure by those who believed she would have to again return fell but dully on Mary's ear, nor did she resent it. Who would care what a gaoler said of spite when the barred gates unclosed and the sunlight streamed once more on pallid brow and cheek? Let him rate never so loud, the far song of the lark on high, the very rustle of the wind in the grass, would be as organ music to his vulgar pipe, and drown him squeaking like a rat in a mountain flood.

From that day on she never knew positive and pinching hunger, or utter despair for the mere means of life. Now and again the cupboard was almost empty and the purse very low, but henceforward they never ran out together, to leave her entirely stranded. She became better known day by day, her

sweet face was in request in many parts of artistic London, and she was often a welcome guest in many an artist's studio for her feminine ways of ready and handy service, with which she was always willing. But nowhere she received a kinder greeting than in that little cluster of studios near Haverstock Hill where we first met her, and in good sooth she was pleased to go there.

It was no wonder Raeburn and the others were glad of her presence. If anything was needed in the way of curtains, Mary Morris gave her advice and often her help. If a piece of drapery for a background was suddenly required, no messenger was so sure to be right as she. Gradually it came to be looked upon as a matter of course that she should make tea whenever four o'clock came if she were at hand, and though other girls needed to be repressed, no one ever found her forward or flippant in act or speech. Their affection towards her was always respectful, if a little light-heartedly

phrased in the outward evidences of their almost boyish talk, and with them she grew at times very cheerful. She was the gravest with Armour. Perhaps because he was himself so grave.

The intercourse between those two was that of a brother and sister, for their affection for each other was quite evident. She made his tea and sometimes washed the tea-things for him ; at odd times she dusted his studio or mended anything which showed mending was necessary. Armour, for his part, was always ready to defend her, and once or twice spoke very fiercely when her name was mentioned with disrespect, or even in a tone which implied it ; and the offence was never repeated in his presence. Nor could it have been by any but a fool, or one who sought a ready means of instant quarrel. He looked upon her as a dear sister, so he would have said, and in that capacity was accustomed at odd times to give her advice. She should not sit for

such an artist, he had a very bad character indeed. She should do thus, or thus. And certainly she usually took heed of what he said, believing that he spoke for her good. Yet sometimes she was a little petulant with him on such points. What was it to him after all?

For example, she was in his studio two days after her visit to Torrington's place, and they talked while Paul played in snatches.

"How short the days get," she murmured, looking up at the darkening skylight dreamily.

"Ay," returned Paul. "It's a way they have at this season of the year. You may light the lamp if you like."

"No, I would rather not. I must go when once I get out of this chair, and music sounds best in this light."

He played on, hardly knowing what, but it was pleasant to hear the sounds come so lightly from beneath his big fingers, just

like a delicate line in an etching. The girl's head sank back in the chair and the light from the stove just tinged her upturned chin. But she was not asleep. Rather wide awake she was and her brain was busy.

"Mr. Torrington seems very fond of music," she said at length, and Paul nodded as he played a little louder.

"I don't think you like him, do you, Mr. Armour?"

"Like him," he answered. "Oh—ah—why not?"

"I knew you didn't," said Mary.

"Hum," returned Paul quietly. "I don't know that I have any reason to like or dislike him. He's no business of mine that I can see. He's fond of art and seems to know something about it—for an outsider. And I should say he was intelligent. But——"

And he played on calmly. He was quite right of course. Torrington was nothing

to him, nothing more than the wind outside, which moaned a little and was heavy with rain—no, not so much. Mary did not reply for a moment, but the smile which he did not see had at least a subtle, a very subtle element of mockery in it. Rather perhaps a certain subacidity.

“Well,” she said at length, “I like him.”

“Yes,” said Paul very calmly still and without ceasing. “And why?”

“Because he has something to say,” she replied, with a trace of irritation which escaped him.

“I admit as much,” retorted the other; “he has lots to say, a great deal. In fact, too much, I should think. He’s always at it. Find Torrington, and he’s talking, wherever it is. Talks in his sleep, I should think. But”—and here Paul showed a trifle of anger himself—“why so much of Torrington?”

“Why not? I may just as well talk of

him as of Mr. Raeburn or Mr. Wynne, mayn't I?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Paul played solitary notes with one finger, as if tracing the argument out.

"Yes, Mary, that's all very well. But why is he in your mind so to-night?"

Her heart beat a little faster than it had done, and she paused.

"Because, Mr. Armour, the day before yesterday I went to see him."

Paul's hands fell with a tremendous crash on the keys, making a horrible discord. He wheeled round and faced her in the semi-darkness, as she exclaimed:

"What a dreadful noise you are making, Mr. Armour."

"You did what, Mary?" he cried.

"I went to see Mr. Torrington."

"At his rooms?"

"Yes."

"You did?"

“Don’t I tell you I did. Of course !
Where else ? ”

“ But, Mary, why ? ”

“ Why not, Mr. Armour ? ”

Paul did not answer, but rose up. His face was very black with anger. If it had not been so dark Mary would have been frightened to see it.

“ Then you are a foolish girl, Mary Morris ! ” he cried, “ and you ought to have known better.”

She fired up.

“ I am not foolish, Mr. Armour, and, moreover, I don’t see any harm in it.”

“ Harm—no,” said Paul, “ of course you don’t, you innocent young fool. I tell you he is a man you have no business to know. He’s a bad man, and even lets people see it.”

Mary was pleased at the splash she had made, and by no means meant to let it end there.

“ It’s all very well of you to say he’s bad ;

but I really believe I know more of him than you do. And I don't think he's bad at all."

"You don't think!" said Paul angrily, "you don't think! What do you know of wickedness in this world? And do you suppose a man who talks like Torrington couldn't persuade a child like you that he's an angel fresh from heaven if he wanted to? You take my advice and don't go near him again. He's not a man for you to know."

Mary pouted, and by no means showed signs of yielding, even though she saw Armour so moved.

"That's all very well," she said; "but I think you're wrong. He was very kind to me, and spoke very gently, and said nothing I didn't like. He was good to me when you were away, and took me to the theatre." Armour almost groaned to see how far this dangerous intimacy had gone. "And I'm

sure he likes me very much too. I'm going there next Wednesday."

Paul had been promenading up and down the studio with his fists clenched, but he stopped at this.

"You will go then after what I have said?"

"Why, I promised to, Mr. Armour," the girl answered, as if that naturally settled the question. And, indeed, it did to her.

"Well, then," said Paul, coldly "I hope you won't regret it. Take my advice and mind what you do."

"Thank you, Mr. Armour," said Mary, with a little dignity, as she rose; "but I am not a child, and can take care of myself."

Paul did not answer. He could not command her. He had no right, and no wish to have a right. But to see her running into such danger, with such a man as this

Torrington. He clenched his fists again, and with difficulty restrained an oath. He turned to Mary, who by this time stood ready to go.

“Then you are going?” he asked.

“Yes, Mr. Armour?”

“I mean to Torrington’s?”

“Yes, Mr. Armour, next Wednesday.”

“Then good night, Mary, good night. I shall see you before then.”

With that she left him and went out into the storm alone, for it was blowing hard and raining. Armour shut the door after watching her out of the lane, and started walking up and down the studio. He muttered to himself every now and again, and at the end of half an hour spoke aloud.

“By heaven, if any harm comes to her, I will smash him!” and he brought his fist down on the closed piano with a crash that jarred every string and made them moan a volume of discords. Assuredly such a man would keep his word if need were.

CHAPTER XI.

TOWARDS TWO ENDS.

DURING the week following Priscilla's visit to him Torrington spent part of every day in the studios, the only places he might reasonably expect to find her. Yet, naturally enough, he was rather pleased than otherwise that he only met her once, and in Raeburn's place, for there was now, almost without his knowing it, an element of jealousy in his feelings concerning these men, who had been her friends so long. Their very reasonable familiarity annoyed him, and once when Wynne jokingly asked her for a kiss, he mentally damned his friend's impudence, and would dearly have liked to expostulate with him on the subject, if it had not been for fear of making

himself ridiculous. Yet, upon the whole, he was in notably good spirits, and even made fun out of the last rejection of his last great work, which in this instance occurred without any torturing deliberation on the part of the publisher. Wynne chaffed him a little on the subject.

“Why the deuce don’t you write something that will sell?” said he once when they were having tea together.

But, naturally enough, Torrington retorted:

“Why, in the name of all that’s ridiculous, don’t you paint something that folks will buy?”

“I do occasionally,” replied Wynne.

“And I do occasionally,” said Torrington, “else how should I live?”

Wynne looked oddly at him.

“Yes, that puzzles a good many people, I think. Come, now, I will give you a subject. Why don’t you write something about William?”

This was the man who attended on them, who cleaned their studios and did their errands, and who certainly was a character.

“If you were to write a paper on him you ought to make money. I wonder what he thinks of us? We must seem a queer lot of fellows to him.”

“You mean *you* must, I presume,” said John, “for you are like all artists—of all kinds—self-conscious.”

“Perhaps I do, but look now, Torrington, it would be interesting. He’s a curious individual, and has been a gardener and a waiter and a porter besides. Apparently he takes not a bit of notice of what goes on here, and yet he must. In fact, I know he does. I should like to know what he thinks of us. Why don’t you keep the stove alight?”

“There’s no coke in the scuttle.”

Wynne rose at this, and opened the door to bellow “William, William!” in a voice

which rang all over the neighbourhood. It seemed at first as if William had gone round the corner to Raven Road; but presently the door opened, and in he came. Though Torrington knew him well, he looked at him again, thinking that he might perhaps be worth something as "material"—yes, even a ten-pound note. He was a man of medium height, aged something under thirty, and of slender build. He wore an overcoat once owned by Monk in the Raven Road studios, and a hat given him by Raeburn. He stooped a little, and had all the appearance of a man with a great deal on his mind.

"Coke, William," said Wynne, and accordingly the battered old scuttle was taken into the yard to be filled. When he returned the dust which ran out of a hole in the bottom made it appear as if a train of gunpowder had been laid across the dingy carpet and dingier boards. When he had filled the stove up noisily he looked at Wynne.

“I got the chop, sir,” said he, “and the bread, sir, and the milk. I told Wilson about the frame, and took them boots to be mended. And that, sir, is the amount of the postal order.”

“Yes, William,” said Wynne in an absent-minded way.

“Is there anything else, sir?”

“I think not, William.”

And out the man went. When the door was closed Torrington burst into a laugh.

“I think you’re right, old man, he might be made something of,” said he.

“You’d think so if you knew what he said about you,” answered the other.

“Eh, what’s that? What was it? Does he ever talk then?”

“He did about you, but then I suppose he thinks you are an outsider and don’t count. I could never get him to say a word about Raeburn, or Armour, or Gaskell. But you might if you tried.”

“But what was it he said about me?” persisted Torrington.

“Ah, I see,” returned Wynne slyly. “You’re like all artists and writers, beastly self-conscious. Well, I’ll tell you as far as I can remember. For it was only this morning when he was cleaning up that I tried him. You see he told me you had called when I was out, and then I led him on.”

Torrington listened eagerly to Wynne’s report of the conversation, which was scarcely so good as the original. It ran thus :

“Oh, Mr. Torrington, sir. Well, yes; he’s a puzzle to me he is. He don’t never work, I should say. I’ve heard him talk as if he wrote things. Oh, it’s true, is it, sir. But when, sir? For he’s walking about Haverstock Hill, and up and down all the time. I meets him in the street all hours, and then he’ll be here half the day sometimes, sir. Then, to say the truth, he lives in a very poor place for a gentleman, and some-

times he looks that seedy, as to his clothes, one would think he had no more than he stood upright in. But next day perhaps I'll see him walking, quite a swell too, with Miss Maxwell; her that lives in one of the big houses in the park, and she looks just as pleased as if he was a lord. Then, sir, he says he don't work no more than two or three hours a day. That seems strange to me, sir, for you gentlemen works a deal more than that even when you ain't working hard. Then, sir, the next day perhaps I meets him with Miss Morris. I have once or twice lately, or if he meets me he walks along with me, for he's a very nice free-spoken gent, I must say that. But I can't see how a gentleman as hasn't money of his own can live by working two hours a day, sir. I wish I could."

"So you go walking with Miss Morris, do you?" said Wynne, when he had finished his recital.

"Why shouldn't I, if I like?" asked

Torrington a little shortly. "She's a very nice girl, and a good girl too."

"I never said she wasn't, did I? But come, now, see if you can get an opinion of me in return for this. For once you see yourself as William sees you. Mind you don't let it out, for I as good as vowed not to say anything about it. If my superior knowledge of the use of language hadn't enabled me to equivocate, I should have been bound to hold my tongue."

Torrington's proceedings during the next few days with regard to William would be almost ridiculous but for their interest as a curious example of "copy" hunting. He was ready enough to take a hint, though sometimes slow to see an opportunity, so now he began to look upon the attendant as perhaps worth ten pounds to him, and took notes accordingly. William was happily unconscious of the scrutiny to which he was subjected, and would have been scornfully incredulous that Torrington looked to

him to make the ways of his courtship as easy as a little ready money might do. He saw no reason to alter his opinion that Mr. Torrington was a "nice, free-spoken gent," and would have added that he was free with his money, too, for John thought it as well to give him a shilling or so. The "copy" hunter had laughed often enough at one thing in William, and that was his intense anxiety to guess beforehand to which studio Torrington was bound. When he had first gone to Maiden Lane to renew his acquaintance with Raeburn, William had no trouble about the matter, but with each succeeding acquaintance that he made the man grew more and more exercised in mind, and was to all appearance downcast if his announcement that "Mr. Raeburn is in, sir," met with the answer, "Thank you, William, but I want to see Mr. Wynne." Finally, he gave it up as a bad job, and was only happy when he was able to smile radiantly and burst out with, "They're all in, sir." This

trick of his was peculiarly annoying to some of the models, for he would sidle up to them and say, "Oh, yes, miss, he's in; and he's all alone, miss," in a confidential way which could hardly be resented but which no one liked.

Beyond this new amusement, which served to draw him from continual thought of Priscilla, Torrington did nothing now save the little journalism which practically supported him. That nothing, however, was exclusive of some pages of MS. devoted to a poem which he called "With Priscilla," and intended to read to her on the occasion of her next coming. And, meanwhile, he paid a visit to his mother and sister, who lived in a very small house situated naturally enough in a close and monotonous quarter of Brixton suited to their very limited means, which Torrington had never been able to add to.

When the elder Torrington died, which he did abruptly and in a characteristically

impulsive way, his affairs had been found in utter confusion. He had been in the habit of insuring his life for large sums, and after the payment of the first premium he was wont to dilate on the very adequate provision made for his wife and semi-invalid daughter, neither of whom he robustly calculated would survive him. Some of these policies he allowed to lapse, some of them he borrowed on, to speculate with the proceeds when anything new took his fancy to the detriment of his business as an auctioneer, and hence on his decease no one was surprised to find that a hundred and ten pounds a year invested in the funds and less by the annually and wrongly deducted income-tax, which there was no sufficient knowledge or perseverance in the family to get refunded, constituted the sole resources left them. Mr. Torrington's income, however, had seldom been less than six hundred a year, and it was only very gradually that his widow learnt to understand that three and

fourpence could not do the duty of a pound, however skilfully it might be supported in the unequal struggle by good housekeeping. Matters went as they frequently do in such cases, for the retrenchment made in the beginning was wholly inadequate, and it was only on the third shifting of quarters that Mrs. Torrington finally yielded to the inevitable, and took a house, for which the remainder of their old furniture was not only too large but absolutely impossible. She parted with the dining-room table with tears, but chiefly lamented the piano on which she, a daughter of the people, had never learned to play, and which Mabel Torrington had neglected entirely since her health had failed.

For a while after his father's death John tried to live at home, but his conduct was at times so scandalous (he had been known to come home drunk once in three years), that it was agreed he had better seek fresh quarters. He did it without lamentation,

though his livelihood was as precarious as sunshine on an April day, for he felt a little choked by any atmosphere of bourgeois respectability, and was never less at home than when in the small family circle of three. Naturally he agreed better with everybody when he was away, and they were heartily glad to see him on his weekly or bi-weekly visits, which he sometimes made more numerous when he was without any immediate prospect of a meal (which, as we have seen, was no infrequent thing with him), for he usually talked enough for half a dozen men, and made things lively for a while at least. But now his mother found him very serious. He got upon the topic of living alone, which she rightly understood as a complaint at not being able to marry a girl of anything like his own degree of culture.

“And I tell you what, mother,” he said, as he stared into the fire, “I’m going to do it no longer.”

He had said it before, and Mrs. Torrington paid little heed to his talk, which, on such occasions, usually degenerated into a monotonous growl, ending in a demand for afternoon tea.

“I mean it, mother,” he insisted; “in fact I’m going to get married, that is, if she’ll have me.”

“Has she got any money?” he was asked a little dryly.

“Not a cent,” was his answer; “and what’s more, I’m glad of it. She’s as poor as I am, and earns her own living.”

These were rather convincing particulars concerning a definite personality, and Mrs. Torrington grew a little alarmed, knowing, as she well did, her son’s impulsive temperament.

“I hope you won’t make a fool of yourself,” she began.

“Thanks, mother,” said he, smiling.

“Nor,” she added significantly, “of any one else. But there, I don’t see how

you can get married on what you make."

Torrington shook his head irritably.

"It's *not* being married that keeps me from making money, that's my opinion. What kind of a dog's life do I lead, think you? I think I shall risk it."

"She will have to risk it, too."

"If she's willing to, she can't be much worse off than she is. That's certain."

"What does she do for a living now?" asked his mother anxiously.

"Never mind that," said he, for he rather dreaded her prejudices; "it's quite honest, don't fret, and she's as good a girl as ever breathed. I'll bring you her photograph, and then you'll see she's beautiful, too."

"But, John, is she a lady?"

Torrington reflected as to his answer, and then spoke deliberately :

"If you mean does she talk like one, dress like one, act like one, look like one, yes. If you mean has she the indefinable air of a

woman of society, no. She's very shy, and younger than her years; but if when you see her you don't think she's the sweetest girl you've ever known me to be taken with why—I'll give her up. I'd stake my life, you will. I want to bring her over to lunch."

"Well," said Mrs. Torrington feebly, "you'd better tell Mabel. I hope you mean well by her."

Torrington blazed up.

"Don't I tell you I mean to marry her?"

His mother held up her hand.

"Well, dear, you'd better tell Mabel. It would be nice for her to see her, perhaps. If you mean it, the girl would feel happier I dare say to know your sister."

Torrington nodded and was pleased to see her come round, and even show so much solicitude for the girl. Perhaps her attitude rather justified Paul Armour's fears. He would have thought so.

"Very well, then," said John cheerfully, "that's settled. Is Mabel in her room?"

He went up and saw her there, and Mabel, who was his junior by two years, but of course a great deal wiser in such matters, promised in a judicial way which rather chilled him to receive her kindly, or if need be come over to his place and meet Priscilla there.

“I tell you, Mabel,” he insisted again ere he left, “she’s the sweetest girl you ever saw, and if you don’t both like her, I’ll give up daring to think I know anything about your sex and just judge women by weight. Then, dear, you will come out low down, for you are as slender as a lily.”

With which he departed.

CHAPTER XII.

HEROES AND VALETS.

WEST was as good or as bad as his word with regard to the bas-relief which he was making of Priscilla, for a day or two after Torrington saw it he remorselessly destroyed his own work by cutting the marble back and starting afresh. Although it was Priscilla's living to sit, she was somewhat sorry to see this done, not only because it was evidently beautiful—a thing she had the taste to recognise—but because she would not have been wholly loth to cease her paid visits to West, who sometimes, though without meaning it, made her miserable by the fits of rage he indulged in at his own supposed inability. Moreover, in his merrier moments,

when hand and chisel obeyed his mind, and the work grew subtly like the vision he saw, he was wont to chaff her a little unmercifully about her fondness for Maiden Lane.

“Who is it? Now tell me,” he said, the second day of her renewed sittings. “I used to believe it was Raeburn; but I think I was out that time. Whose tea do you take the greatest pleasure in making? If you’ll tell me I won’t let it out.”

The girl blushed a little, and shook her head.

“I’m fond of all of you, Mr. West,” she said; “even of you when you’re not unkind and don’t get angry.”

West poised the four-pound hammer as though he would throw it at her.

“You are a cunning young woman, and would like to confuse the issue. Come now, is it Wynne? He’s very handsome, and all the girls down at the school quarrel about him. Now, is it Wynne?”

“I like him very much,” she replied.

“ Well,” said West, hammering softly, and then blowing the dust away which lodged on the top of the ear, “ I believe it is Armour, after all. There, I said so ! ”

For she blushed slightly once more.

“ It’s no such thing, Mr. West ! ” she cried, a little angrily, “ and you ought to know better.”

“ Then,” persisted the amused sculptor, “ it’s Torrington. I saw you walking in Camden Town with him twice. You didn’t see me, for I was on a ’bus. Ah ! I know I am right now.” .

She smiled quietly.

“ Very well, Mr. West,” she said, “ if you are right and know it, there’s no use bothering me. Perhaps it is Mr. Torrington.”

And then West, who had a different opinion, went on with his work so earnestly that he soon swore, and threw down his hammer in uncontrolled vexation. But the girl said to herself that she wished he would leave the subject alone. Why should she

be supposed to come there for any special end when she treated every one alike. It was rather rude of Mr. West. That was her opinion, and she would have liked to tell him so.

Seeing that Torrington now spent most afternoons loafing in one or the other of the five studios, she was not surprised to meet him on leaving West's. He came across the road, and, turning, walked back with her to the Hill. The conversation ran on quite indifferent things, and went easily, for, while she, strangely enough, was only vaguely conscious of the attention he was paying her, he had sufficient self-control to be fairly light in manner when there was no opportunity of making any serious advance. Yet just before parting he changed his tone.

"Don't forget Wednesday evening 'at seven," he said, without laying any evident stress on it, but still more seriously.

"Oh, I'm not sure, Mr. Torrington," she began.

“Oh, yes, you are,” cried he. “Of course you are sure. By the way, I have been writing some verse for you. We will call it poetry if you like. I shouldn’t be surprised if it is. And it’s all about you and—— me.”

“Really, Mr. Torrington? Do you mean it?”

“Of course I do. You will come, then?”

She shook her head and looked serious, and hesitated ere she spoke.

“I’m not sure——”

“Why are you not sure,” burst out Torrington. “Why, what’s the matter? Has anybody been spinning you yarns about me?”

For his uneasy self-consciousness that such “yarns” might be spun truthfully alarmed him. Priscilla fairly started at his coming so near the truth, but she covered up her confusion by answering instantly and a little falsely too.

“Oh, no, Mr. Torrington, it’s not that

at all. Who should say things about you?"

"A good many might," thought John ruefully, regretting now his open talk of only a little while ago. "Then why won't you come? I believe I know."

She certainly started then most unmistakably, and he saw it.

"Tell me, Mr. Torrington," she exclaimed.

"No," he answered; "if I did, you would not say whether it was true or not."

"Oh yes I would," she insisted; "please tell me."

Torrington reflected a minute. It was rather difficult to say what he had in his mind. He looked at her doubtfully, and saw a little vague uneasiness in her eyes.

"If I told you, Priscilla, you might think it very conceited of me," he said a trifle awkwardly.

"Oh, no," said she, now relieved from the fear that he had somehow penetrated

her mind and discovered her talk with Armour. "I won't, I assure you."

"Then," said Torrington slowly, "is it not because you think that if you come to see me too often you might end by—by—getting a little too fond of me?"

She looked up at him and dropped her eyes again.

"No, that's not it, Mr Torrington; but I'll come on Wednesday. Good-bye."

And with that she left him to ponder whether this conversation augured ill for him or well. In spite of all his belief in his power to judge speech and character, he ended by coming to the conclusion that time only could tell. A conclusion which most male prophets would do well to adopt in like cases.

Whether or not Torrington was to be fortunate in his love affair remained to be seen, but certainly his luck with William, the studio attendant, was remarkable and in the end advantageous; for some months

afterwards he sold a paper containing a sketch of the unsuspecting individual whom he had pumped. Wynne sent William to his place with a note about a drawing Torrington had asked him to do, ending up with the remark, "Why don't you try to get something out of the bearer?"

Fortunately William appeared to be in a communicative mood, and was not loth to take a little whiskey which John offered him. It acted upon him like magic; he sat more securely on his chair, and placed his hat upon the floor. Torrington began to write his answer, to all appearance, but as a matter of fact he was taking notes, although the first communication William made nearly made him forget his plan.

"I saw Miss Morris to-day, sir," said he.

Torrington looked at him sternly, but the remark was apparently made without any afterthought.

"Yes, I dare say," said his host, in

an absent minded way. "Fine weather, William, is it not?" he added tentatively.

"Yes, sir; for the time of year, sir."

"But there, William, I suppose it is pretty much the same with you rain or shine. They keep you pretty busy, eh?"

William took a drink and looked at him solemnly.

"Busy ain't the word, sir. There oughter be another. I'm on the go from morning to night, what with Mr. Raeburn, and Mr. Armcur, and Mr. Gaskell, and Mr Wynne, to say nothing of Mr. Monk and Mr. Ward and the others at the Raven Road place round the corner. Why, sir, I do assure you it's plenty, more especially when they all comes out at once and bellows 'William!' 'William!' till I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels."

"Yes, I know," said Torrington. "I've heard them at it. But this letter will be

a long one, William. Have some more whiskey."

He shook his head, but yielded, after a slight struggle.

"Well, sir, I don't mind, as Mr. Wynne said I was to wait for an answer."

"Ah," said Torrington carelessly, as he wrote on, "is Mr. Wynne a trying gentleman?"

"Is he, sir?" replied William confidentially. "Well, sir, as long as it don't go any further, and I knows it won't with you, Mr. Torrington, I don't mind saying that he is. And, sir, he's a puzzle to me, is Mr. Wynne."

He nodded sagaciously.

"How's that, William?"

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. Do you know, I've worked for him for three years, and I ain't certain whether he's rich or whether he's poor. Sometimes I thinks one thing and then another. He never lets on to me if he's hard up, as Mr. Ward will. Why,

he, sir, one day says to me, 'William, get me half an ounce of shag' (not a tobacco a gentleman smokes, sir, either), and when I brings it, he says, kind of careless like, 'I'll pay you to-morrow ; I haven't any change.' Of course he hadn't, sir. And he didn't pay me for nigh on to a fortnight."

"Yes, but Mr. Wynne?" insisted Torrington, who took more interest in his particular friend, knowing, moreover, how gratified that friend was likely to be by an unbiassed opinion.

"Oh, yes, sir, Mr. Wynne! As I says, he never lets on if he's hard up. Now sometimes he togs up and goes out to dinner, and sometimes he tells me to get him a chop. Now, sir, at first I thought that he went out when he was rich to have his grub up town, and when he was hard up he stayed in and cooked his chop hisself. But now, sir, I ain't so sure of all that. I think perhaps he's that artful that when he can't afford a chop he dresses up and

goes out to take a walk, and that when he's got money he has a chop in the studio. But there, after all I can't say, for I have seen cuttings from newspapers which spoke of him as if he was a swell. But then I know his clothes ain't that fine, though he may have five pairs of boots. But, then, would he live that way if he was rich? I says to myself, 'No;' but then I turns and says, 'Yes.' But, sir, do you know, sometimes I thinks he ain't quite in his right mind?"

Torrington, who with difficulty restrained his laughter at the absurdity of William's comments on an artist's life, turned to look at him. He was bending forward and nodding violently.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Torrington.

"I'll tell you, sir. Sometimes I goes in to his place and goes behind to clean up. You'd be surprised at the muck there is there sometimes. And while I'm cleaning

up I reckons up to myself how much he owes me. I says, 'there's threepence for the celery, three; sevenpence for the cheese, ten; threepence for the brown paper, one and a penny; threepence farthing for the bread, one and fourpence farthing.' And then I says, 'That'll be one and fourpence farthing, sir,' so that he may know, and then he bursts into a laugh as one might hear at the other studios. And why, sir, no one can tell."

Torrington could not help smiling at this, for he too knew William's habits, and had often chuckled to hear a mysterious voice issue from a kind of dark oracular cave at the end of a studio, with the disconnected remark of, "That will be elevenpence three-farthings, sir," or some such sum. But now his smile was fatal. William saw it and drew in his horns, probably regretting that he had been so communicative, and Torrington, who saw there was no more to be extracted from him, really wrote his

answer and put it in an envelope. He gave William threepence, which he could ill afford.

The tipped-one in regaining the street drew the three coppers from his pocket and looked at them again.

“Well,” said he, “it ain’t much, but I know he’s poor at any rate. But Lord, how does he live at all? That’s what I should like to know.”

He did not know that Torrington had often asked himself the very same question and had left it unanswered. There are many such in the art world.

CHAPTER XIII.

A POETIC PROPOSAL.

AN outsider, and especially a rich outsider of bourgeois tastes and tendencies, would probably have been amused to see Torrington trying, and trying in vain, to make his solitary room look as clean as it was apparently cosy on the morning preceding Priscilla's promised Wednesday visit. The amount of dust he discovered behind the books on the mantelpiece was so appalling that he almost regretted his inability to allow any meddling with his peculiar property, and his almost old-maidish ways. For everyone who lives alone, and attends mostly on himself, develops as many tricks as any old lady who has no one to keep her

company but a tabby cat and a volume of sermons ; and Torrington was no exception to the rule. He would have perished on the spot sooner than allow any living mortal to touch a book or even dust a picture ; while any general cleaning for which he himself did not make most elaborate preparations, by locking up in a cupboard all his papers and manuscripts, would have reduced him to a state of lunacy. So now he had to handle the broom and duster himself, though he would have let things rest comfortably for another month had it not been for fear of Priscilla's eye and feminine disgust at what she would most likely, though of course absurdly, have called dirt.

After much coughing and choking, he put things in some kind of decency and order, although it took three separate dustings before the air grew clear enough to observe distinctly the distances of the room. Exhausted with toil, he threw himself in a

chair, lighted a very black clay pipe, which he kept for home use, and contemplated his work with a sense of domestic satisfaction and ability no respectable householder can ever hope to experience. No, not even after moving into a new house and inconveniencing everybody by insisting on tacking the carpets down himself.

“Well,” said John, as he smoked, looking at his grimy hands, “I really suppose I’m what folks call a Bohemian. Which is a neat way of saying I have to be my own servant without board or wages or—character. Hum! I’m tired of it. It would be better to be a bourgeois after all. There’s nothing to compensate for all this but the fact that I can get up when I like. But perhaps Miss Priscilla will alter that. Heigho!”

He rose up languidly, and went out to discover that he had indeed risen so late that it was even then getting on towards four o’clock. That he had not known this

sooner was due to the neighbouring church clock having stopped, for, as Torrington once grimly remarked to Gaskell, the real hall-mark of a true Bohemian consists in having an expensive watch occupying apartments at a pawnbroker's at an annual rent—the interest of the loan; and that any man who kept possession of one for more than a month was *ipso facto* no longer a member of the impecunious brotherhood.

When the second nearest clock struck seven, Torrington was climbing his doorstep laden with a pot of marmalade, half a pound of “best fresh” butter, and a loaf procured at the neighbouring grocer's with two shillings he had borrowed from Gaskell. The change went for an ounce of tobacco and some cigarette papers. He placed his purchases in the cupboard on the right-hand side of the fireplace, and then put the kettle on the fire. For now every moment was precious. Priscilla had promised to

come at seven, and might thus be expected about half-past; so he had no time to lose in making everything bright. Certainly, in spite of his undoubted poverty, the room did look pleasant when the red blinds were down, half hidden by chocolate-banded brown curtains, and the fire contended for the mastery with the green-shaded lamp, which stood on the table in a much clearer space than usual. The room looked small it is true, while the table was gigantically obvious, but it was so warm in reality and colour that many a richer Bohemian might have envied him its apparent comfort. And John was very bright and happy too—for him at any rate—since nothing seemed to stand in his way to that greater happiness which just showed afar from the ideal land of hope beyond the rainbow. “Yes, the rainbow of tears—of happy tears!” he said, and whistled incontinently, “*In questa tomba oscura,*” in a quick time which destroyed the melody’s deep melancholy.

And then, actually at half-past seven and no later, he heard Priscilla's knock.

He stood at the top of the stairs with the lamp in his left hand, leaving the right ready to press hers. His face lighted up and his eyes gleamed when he saw her.

"Ah, then, dear girl, you have come," he said. "Do you know, though I trusted your word, I was afraid something might happen to stop my weekly delight."

Priscilla smiled, and entered the room almost laughing. The half emotion Torrington showed was pleasing to her, and yet it was so strange. He talked to her as no other man had ever done.

"I am not so sure I ought to have come, Mr. Torrington," she said a trifle nervously; "I only did it to——"

"Oh yes, I understand—yes," broke in her host, who knew she was thinking of his last talk with her, "but that was only my nonsense. Or," he added hastily, "if not exactly nonsense, it was because I begin to

think I shall be getting too fond of you myself."

Priscilla did not sit down, nor attempt to take off her long cloak, which reached almost to the ground. When she did remove it, at his request, he laughed lightly.

"Thank you," he said.

"For what, Mr. Torrington."

"For coming in your terra-cotta robe, sweet saint. You should always wear it, or one like it."

"One like it, then, for this is nearly worn out. I always am wearing it. You see Mr. Raeburn likes me in it and so does Mr. Armour."

"Oh, confound Mr. Armour," muttered Torrington, who would have like to see Armour deputed to sketch in Morocco for a season.

"What's that you say, Mr. Torrington?" said Priscilla, turning round as she put her hat and cloak down.

“Nothing, my dear girl, nothing. I was only thinking. Sometimes I think aloud. It comes from living so much alone. Why, I walk up and down the room for an hour at times, and finally make myself jump by saying something in a loud voice, which echoes all over the place. It is as startling as dreaming a funny dream and waking one’s self laughing. That is almost ghastly. Just fancy sitting up in bed suddenly in the black darkness, laughing at a brilliant joke in a bright dream of day.”

“It must be horrid,” assented the girl, who was a deal more in the habit of waking up to find her pillow wet with tears.

“I should think so,” said Torrington. “Do you know it would be like suddenly waking and finding this was a dream, and that you were not here?”

Priscilla looked up smiling, and Torrington started.

“Nay, I don’t mean you are a joke,

Priscilla. You are not. You are a very serious little girl. And I always look on you very seriously."

"You said you wrote some poetry about me, Mr. Torrington. Are you going to read it to me?"

John looked at her and twisted his head slowly on one side in a half-negative way. Yes, he had written some verse about her, and some serious verse too. But then to read it might precipitate matters. He determined not to do it. But alas! for the resolution of a vain poet. Was there ever a verse writer yet who could resist a sincere invitation to show his latest production? Surely not; and Priscilla had enough curiosity to be earnest in her request, which she repeated.

"Bless the girl!" said Torrington in amusement. "Then she shall have her verse. Not now, though. There is plenty of time for me to bore you with that. It is not eight yet. Come, talk to me. Pipe

to me, Priscilla, and I will dance. The blue devils have been moaning unto me and I have lamented. Cheer up your poet. Chatter and tell me things. Tell me about the artists, and if you do I will write a paper and call it—hum, what shall I call it—‘A Saint’s Revenge,’ I think, for you can be spiteful to those you don’t like.”

“I like them all, Mr. Torrington.”

“What, all of them? Do you like me too?”

“You’re not an artist,” she said slyly.

“Oh, yes, I am Pris, and you’re sitting to me now. That is the advantage of being ‘me.’ I get my models for nothing; for nothing but a few nice words—and perhaps a little marmalade. See, I got some to-day! I could write down how you look, and I shall be able to do it a year hence. Do you think I shall forget your brown dress? Nay, I shall remember every fold in it. Or your hair which I plaited? or your sweet face? No, Priscilla, you have been sitting,

and I have you safe. Come, now, tell me whether you like me as well as the artists ? ”

Priscilla twisted a little in the low canvas chair.

“ Oh, yes, Mr. Torrington, of course I like you. Why shouldn't I, when you are nice and kind to me ? ”

“ Ah,” said John, “ I wonder whether you like me half as well as I do you. Once you said you thought I was very fickle.”

She had done so in Raeburn's studio, *à propos* of a little mock heroic love he had made to her one day.

“ I think you are now, Mr. Torrington.”

He looked hurt, and his voice changed instantly. Though it was not always melodious and often harsh, yet it was so suddenly sympathetic that these quick changes were a feature in the man, and already Priscilla grew to interpret his moods.

“ I am sorry you think so,” he began, when she interrupted.

“I am sorry I said so, Mr. Torrington. I don’t know that I meant it. I know so little of you.”

“Ah, there it is,” said he tenderly; “there it is. You do know so little of me. But perhaps you will know more some day, and then I think you will like me. Perhaps even more.”

He stared into the fire as he spoke, and the girl did not look up, for her own soul was so ready to fly to her eyes, and speak what she would fain keep hidden, that at times she feared to let him look at her. For his eyes always appeared so keen that she gave him credit for reading some of her thoughts.

“Well, Priscilla, you must get to know me better,” he went on; “and I mean you shall; to that end I will read you the verses I made to you the other night. They’re not so good as they might be, nor so good as they might be made; but if you haven’t the soul to see they are sincere,

why, you are not the Saint Priscilla I thought you."

He turned with that to a pile of MSS. on the edge of the table, and hunted for the poem, while Priscilla sat in a state which was a curious mixture of pleasure and pain. It was pleasant to have verse written to her, and yet what would it be about? It certainly seemed as if Torrington was getting very fond of her. She was woman enough to be pleased with that, and child sufficient to think of it only as a garland of roses given to her. It certainly did not touch her heart deeply, though she was not of the type of woman who will see a man twist off the only flower his soul will ever grow, and, longing lightly for its possession, cast it from her carelessly before the night drops its dew of sleep upon her arid bosom, which love has honoured, and in which he has been betrayed and scorned. No. Priscilla was simple and kindly, and if ever she were cruel it would

not be her fault, but the inherent vice there is in all things beautiful that they are too few for the hands and eyes that desire them.

“Well,” said Torrington at last, “here is the great work. Let me tell you what it is first. It needs a kind of short preface, for it deals with your last visit here. Do you remember what we talked about, Priscilla?”

“Some things, I dare say, Mr. Torrington.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter if you have forgotten. It is all the better, perhaps, because you won’t be able to say I am wrong, although you can tell me when you think I am. I have called it “With Priscilla,” and under that title it shall one day be published to the universe, which, up to the present time, has been blind to the author’s surpassing merits. Though in the meantime, Priscilla, if my present audience likes it, I don’t care a single

solitary hang for the whole universe, from Sirius down to a sack of sawdust. That's a fact."

And he began to read—just glancing at her ere he did so—with a voice which trembled a little to start with, but soon got firm enough for just emphasis and due division.

Ah, Priscilla, Saint Priscilla, though you pure and perfect are

When I see you from a distance like a beacon or a star,

Yet I know you are a woman and your promises are such

As most other women's are, dear, when you trust them overmuch ;

For you said it should be seven, and behold it grows so late,

That the old brick church that's yonder soon will speak, and after eight

I shall turn and get my papers, working with what zeal I may,

In this solitary chamber where I would that you might stay.

By the time Torrington got so far, his voice had adjusted itself to the rhythm, and

he was partially unconscious, in the satisfaction of reading, of the effect he was producing. It is very difficult to analyse the effect of such a poem upon a woman of Priscilla's character. She was vaguely conscious of pleasure in being made the subject of verse; that, indeed, seems inherent in the sex, or lovers would not so invariably fly to it for aid; but, beyond that pleasure was an uneasy expectancy. She was not ready to meet any direct appeal. Nevertheless, Torrington, as he sat reading, was not without an attraction for her: she felt the suppressed emotion of the man. She was moved by the swing and music of the rhythm, and began ere long to be, as it were, under a certain spell. Torrington had made a longish rhetorical pause, but he proceeded—

Well, I've left the door wide open, so that I may hear her knock.

Shall I hear her first, I wonder? dear Priscilla, or the clock?

There, I heard a faint, faint rapping at the street
door down below,
Yes, 'tis she, I'm sure. I wonder if she would as
gladly go
As I do, if she were waiting in her chamber till I
came.

His voice changed so suddenly now, that
Pricilla started.

Yes, come in, dear girl, and boldly, for you know I
cannot blame
Your late coming, though I wished to. I would
sooner blame the light
Of the very sun in heaven at his leaping into
sight.
And besides, if I could do it, surely in the pleasant
place
You will make my room this evening with your
pure and saintly face,
None could have a thought or memory of the
moment when in fear
He believed he would not see you as he does now
you are here.

You can only stay some minutes? Half-an-hour?
Three-quarters? Fudge!
You have come to stay the evening and I will not
let you budge,

While the fire I've lighted for you glimmers in the
joyful room,
That is glad to catch and hold you with the sweet
and rare perfume
Dropping from your long, loose hair, dear,—loose
because *they* wish it so?—
Well, where was I? I remember, and repeat you
must not go
Till the ruddy embers flicker wan and wanner in
the grate,
Do not rob me of your presence, Saint Priscilla, you
were late.

Come now, put your hat and cloak down. You shall
have the canvas chair,
And I'll take this one with rickets that so sadly
needs repair,
For you've come to see a poet, one that few folks
recognise,
Who will deem his work rewarded by the thanks in
your sweet eyes,
(Dark they are, my Saint Priscilla's, whom I worship
in one niche
Of the Church of Love and Labour) whose regard
can make me rich.
Rich and careless of the money that rewards the art
it slays
Which a nobler race will reckon sometime in the
coming days

Paid by that which makes it human. Heavens,
how my tongue runs on,
Let me listen, dear Priscilla (I must talk, 'tis close
upon
The three-quarters), for you know, sweet, when I
hear you talk, your speech
Makes me think, it is so tuneful, that your very
accents teach
Melody and strange soul rhythms that shall come
again in song,
When I try to put in verses love that makes me
weak and strong!
Weak, indeed; you, you must know it, you who do
not care so much.
Strong, too, dear, for though I suffer, every nerve
your fingers touch
Trembles by the great endurance of the harpstrings
of my soul,
When their blast of stormy passion makes tremendous
music roll,
Like the organic wind's world anthem, pulsing on
from star to star,
Gathering glory as it thunders o'er the dreadful
deeps they bar.

His voice rose and fell strangely, and
Priscilla, for whom the music overpowered
the meaning, though that certainly was not

wholly clear, felt as if a flood of sound, a wave, poured over her. She thrilled just a little, affected sensuously, as when that strange emotion called "sensation" goes through a crowd. Then she lifted her head, and, catching Torrington's eye, she was about to speak. But he raised his hand with the palm towards her, bidding her be silent.

Silence—yes—a little silence coming after such a burst

That, perhaps, seems incoherent. Were you never trebly cursed

With the wish for full expression, by its failure in the act

And the written grave reproaches that remain the only fact

Set on paper when the moment has for ever passed you by

And the truth you sought seems empty and to other folks a lie?

No! you were not, that's our burden; you, Priscilla, have your own,

Would that they would vanish even as this hour of talk has flown,

For if you had none to bear, sweet, I, perhaps, might
never fight

With the devils that will torment me in this empty
room to-night.

For I know you can't be happy if a single soul is
sad,

And when saints rejoice in heaven, oh, be sure the
world is glad ;

For I speak as if believing in a vanished creed,
although

I have none but Love and Labour. Yet, Priscilla,
do you know

Your still face and sweet grave presence can restore
the withered creed,

Like the sun and rain together that uplift both
flower and weed,

And can bring a crop centupled from a mummy's
dried up seed.

Yes, you know you make me better. Ah, you're
smiling, I declare,

I suppose I've been declaiming with a somewhat
serious air.

Look now, I'll reform and chatter, tell you verses
blithe and gay,

Sing you songs or get the teacups, anything, that
you may stay ;

Read you part of my last story, that the publishers
re'ect ,

For the scene is laid so near us that with care you
may detect

Half-a-dozen men and women. Nay, then, I will
make the tea,

And we'll talk and drink together. Sugar? none,
my dear, for me."

This last touch of realism was too much
for Priscilla, who got quite excited.

"Oh, Mr. Torrington, how very clever
you are!" she burst in. "How very like
it is. And to be able to make poetry of it!
It does seem funny."

John smiled. The praise was not great
in quality, but it was sincere, and, coming
from the girl he loved, it was sweet.

"I daresay it is funny, Priscilla," he said;
"but it isn't so awfully clever after all. It's
Bohemia done into verse, and very common-
place after all, except that you are in it.
That is the only thing beautiful. If there
is any art in the thing it is the contrast
between you and the tea cups—between a
saint and sugar. But shall I go on, or are
you tired?"

“Oh, no, Mr. Torrington,” said the girl, eagerly, and, to say the truth, she was not. Moreover, now, she was not afraid. She had forgotten about Armour who, in the earlier part of the evening, had been in her thoughts as angry with her for coming. But then how wrong he was. How could Mr. Torrington, who wrote such nice poetry, and read it in such a nice voice, be a bad man? “Please go on,” she said, and he went on accordingly—

Don't you think it sad, Priscilla, that we poets
cannot thrive

On that airy diet, dreaming, which still keeps our
souls alive,

Seeing poems are a drug, dear, and that British
readers hiss

When they hear a novel mentioned which has much
analysis?

For that's just the way things go, dear. Still I
think I am a fool

To be prating in this fashion when the room is
growing cool,

And you have to go away soon. Let me plait your
loosened hair!

Can't you plait in four, Priscilla ? Then I'll teach
you. Take this chair,
And I'll have the one beside it, close beside you. I
delight
In this touch of hair that glimmers underneath the
lamp, so bright
In your eyes that aren't so saintly as they were some
moments since.
(Now sit quiet, or I'll pull it, pull it till I make you
wince).
Do you know I just remember, not distinctly, what
was said
In a sonnet by a woman who is famous now, and
dead,
How she dreamed that some one drew her backward
by her streaming hair
Till she wondered, vaguely fearing it was Death
behind her there,
And at last she asked the question, fluttering like a
netted dove,
When the one who held her answered. 'Nay, it is
not Death, but Love.'

His voice failed slowly almost to a whisper,
and Priscilla looked into the fire. The em-
phasis on the situation was marked, and
"Love" seemed long drawn out until it
lost its dependent significance and stood

alone. The next two lines and a half he read as if murmuring to himself, as if pondering over a point in solitude.

So I hold you, but I fancy you might easily get
free

Tho' I grasp your hair so tightly. It is I who
cannot see

How you hold me.

There! I've done it. For I learnt to
plait in four

When I was at sea, Priscilla, and in six or even
more.

Can you do it? Try it over. 'Tis an easy
synthesis.

And, perhaps, you will reward me? If you won't
I'll take a kiss.

Nay, I will not! I will rather beg it on my bended
knees,

Rather court you in a hundred sonnets from the
Portuguese,

Till I woo your heart to hear me and respond again
in kind;

Then the time will come when going you will leave
the joy behind

Of your lips upon my own lips, so that I may easier
write

Of two lovers in some story, when I am alone that
night.

He stretched out his right hand as he read, and laid it very tenderly on the girl's bowed head. Priscilla did not move, she seemed almost spellbound, for, aided by an emotion which was evident, his voice grew as musical as the mood which had inspired his love poem; and, under the fascination of his words, the subdued glow of the lamp, and the red heat of the silent fire, the girl's fibres so relaxed that she seemed for a while plastic in his hand. He felt that it was so, and went on with a sudden joy which was almost triumph.

Bless your tender heart, Priscilla, bless you dear.

It is no quaint

Fancy in an idle poet to prefer you to a saint,

Whether Botticelli made her or an artist in church
glass

Sets her in a window vaguely seen by those who
daily pass,

Only to be contemplated by the ghosts of men who
died,

Or the pious hearts of worship who can leave the
world outside.

I can't do that, for my church is arched by heaven
and not by stone,
And its organ is responsive unto Love, and Love
alone,
And the anthem therein chanted runs like sunflame
fast and free
Over all the world of Labour and the passionate
heaving sea
That reflects my soul and heaven's. Does it catch
yours, too, my sweet,
Do the waters circling round me lave your lips and
tender feet ?
Do you hear that anthem pealing from the earth
and skies above,
To the awful organ's answering to the great musician
Love ?

Yes, I think you hear it faintly, as you sit and bow
your head,
Looking earnestly before you at the fire's that's
dying red,
Which to-night has been a furnace wherein I have
sternly cast
All the bitter shame and sorrow that belong to what
is past
So that only gold is left me ; yes, you hear, and as
for me
What you say is sacred scripture and of more
authority.

Yes I think so ; I believe it, though you said I
was not true—
No ? Not false ? Well, very fickle, only caught by
what was new,
And perhaps you're right, Priscilla, but remember
saints are rare,
And I never saw one sitting till to-night in this old
chair
Which has held more sinners truly (there now—
don't get up again)
So this change that has come o'er me shows that I
can hold the grain
That is golden when the chaff's gone. Mayn't I
praise you ? Dear, I must,
For I never saw the mortal that I felt my heart
could trust
Till I spoke with you, Priscilla. See what power
you have for good
For you really have what fancy can bestow on stone
and wood
By an altar. See, how stands it ? I'm the mortal,
you the saint
Fit for any rarest missal that a cunning monk could
paint,
(Do be quiet, sweet) moreover, you can open heaven
again
Even—really it's too bad, dear, you have snapped
the pleasant chain
Of the thoughts that link together far off things and
clearly draw

All the rebel world of fancy to obey the poet's
law.

Even as I put together in a shining fourfold
plait

Your wild hair which you extinguish underneath a
human hat

When you ought to wear a nimbus, or a golden
ribbon's line.

Nay, Priscilla, don't be wrathful with my chatter's
loose design

And we'll talk of art.—You're going? Just as I
begin to talk?

Well then, if you must, I'm with you for my usual
evening walk.

Tho' I wish that it were longer (aye, as long as life);
your shawl?

Here it is, and as you go, dear, pray be careful lest
you fall,

For the turnings at the corners of this cursed
crooked stair

Make me wonder I'm alive yet, or at least in good
repair.

Well, we're at the bottom safely: all the other folks
I see

Are in bed, I hope, and happy. They are not like
you and me

For you know we are Bohemians (now I will not
call you saint

In the secular street) and struggle hard with ink, or
clay, or paint,

While their great idea is riches. What is yours,
Priscilla? Mine
Would be—yes, to go to Florence! How on earth
did you divine
What my thoughts were and my wishes? On my
soul I think I know.
Is it not because you wondered whether you would
ever go
To the country of the olive? Yes. Well, who can
say what climes
May receive us when the public clamours for my
idle rhymes.
But my other thoughts, Priscilla? Can you guess
them and declare
What they are? Nay, do not hurry (what a
nuisance, we are there);
Here's your number; I shall see you sometimes
soon, or else I'll write,
And meantime you'll not forget me, will you, dearest
saint? Good night!

So Torrington ceased reading. For he
had come to an end of his two nights'
work, and was now struggling with a great
desire to speak plainly to her, more plainly
even yet than he had done in these verses,
wherein his heart's wish was very plainly to

be read. But Priscilla was silent and timid. She would have given a great deal to speak in an unconcerned voice, or even to speak at all, but she could not utter a word until he did, for she was moved in a way which she did not understand. It was the time and the season, the lover and his words, working on her soul. She was troubled as a flower might be that was not yet to bud when the first winds and soft rains of spring moistened its outward covering. She began to realise how matters stood, and was alarmed at what she had done, or at least suffered to come to pass.

“Do you like it, dear?” said Torrington, at length; and she answered softly:

“Yes, Mr. Torrington; I think it is very beautiful.”

John shook his head vaguely.

“Indeed, Priscilla! I fear that is, after all, only your want of deep knowledge. You see, you don’t know what poetry is.”

“Indeed, Mr. Torrington,” she interrupted, “I do know, and I am fond of it. You ask Mr. Armour; he often reads Shelley and Keats to me.”

“Ah, I dare say, dear; but I meant you don’t know the technical faults of a thing. You can recognise the feeling, the emotion of the writer, but you cannot tell where he fails. I know that only too well. But you can see that I felt what I was writing, can’t you, Pris?”

She hesitated, and looked troubled.

“Ye-es, Mr. Torrington, I think so.”

He bent towards her, and, as he took her hand, a great surge of passion swept over him, making his brain reel and his body tremble.

“What do you think I felt, my child?” he asked.

But she did not answer.

“What, Priscilla?” he insisted.

“I don’t know, Mr. Torrington.”

He lifted her hand slowly, and, in spite

of her slight timid reluctance, kissed it softly.

“ I think you do, dear,” he said, as he let it fall gently and leant back in his chair, wondering in silence whether he should speak or not—whether it was wise or foolish—whether he might not lose her by being in too great a hurry or by waiting. He could not tell; and yet the silence, the soft light and the fire, worked on him, too. Had there been no hot coals in the grate; had the lamp burnt very brilliantly; had she been able to speak fluently, he would have gone no further then. But now the room looked so like a home, with this “loving woman, tender, warm, and pure and true” in its solitude, that he began to see he must speak, that he could not refuse his urgent desires voice, as they clamoured dumbly for utterance in the fevered current of his blood. “Priscilla,” he said, and then stopped. She did not look up, but her hands, which clasped each other and

lay lightly on her lap, trembled a very little.

“I think I told you once, Priscilla,” he began again, without now knowing whither speech would lead him, “that I wasn’t a very good man. You hardly know what that means; and yet you, pure and sweet as you are, know better than some girls would. I don’t know why I should have told you so much, if it is not that I have a certain honesty in me after all, which somehow rather surprises me, seeing how much to one’s advantage it usually is to be dishonest in the sense of not being very open. But that’s beside the point. My life begins to pall on me. I am sick of living with my own thoughts. I might as well sit under a poison tree. I am tired of being alone—tired of it.”

He paused and gazed at the fire. He pointed at it, and smiled.

“See, Priscilla, how bright the coals are. Did I not say I burnt the sorrow of the

past in it? I ought to have extinguished it for ever with such fuel of tears. To-night I am not thinking so much of the days gone by. I rather look towards the future. Do you ever think of your own, Priscilla? What is it to be?"

"I don't know, Mr. Torrington."

"No one does, my girl. Still one may guess. Yours should be happy—your eyes were never meant to weep salt tears—your lips should speak nothing but sweet words, and when they become silent close on a beautiful thought, like a scented flower folding at night. And what is my own future to be? I wonder if you can prophesy, Priscilla? Let me hear you say. Won't you tell me, child?"

She indeed looked like a child that is vaguely alarmed by something which is beautiful afar off, but seems strange as it approaches. The sight of passion to a virgin soul has a quality of terror. It is so vast and embracing. Her life runs like a

fresh stream going unwilling into the great sea. There is a meeting of waters, and a sense of trouble. The maiden meets the unknown, and shrinks back afraid. And in Priscilla were many thoughts conflicting with the desire and pity which passion provokes as inevitably in a woman as the sun the sheltering cloud. She began to fear Torrington, and did not answer, for she did not fathom him or judge him aright.

“I think you might tell me, Priscilla, if you would,” he said, catching her left hand again, and holding it tightly. “I believe you can.” His voice fell, and he almost whispered as he dropped on his knee beside her chair. “Dear, don’t you know I love you—that I love you.” She turned to him, and her beautiful eyes seemed full of fear, which yet did not comprehend. And she trembled violently. “Priscilla, haven’t you a word for me—a single word? Did you not see this coming? Did you not know I was getting to love you, as everyone

must with eyes to see you? Tell me, dearest, didn't you—didn't you? My darling, will you marry me?"

She did not speak, and placing his right hand half round her waist, he tried gently to draw her towards him. But she did not yield, though she endeavoured to speak.

"Oh, Mr. Torrington, I—I never thought of this. I didn't think of it. Oh, no!"

But there was no anger or fear now in her voice. His heart leaped again. What did it matter if she were surprised if she did not mean to reject him? That she assuredly had no direct intention of doing, and let him but have the chance of courting her, he believed he could gain her. For he believed so in passion and its power!

"I don't care now, dear, even if you didn't. Perhaps I was in a hurry. But," and his voice sighed, "don't you love me, Priscilla?"

Her lips trembled and she hesitated.

"I like you very much, Mr. Torrington,

and I think you're very clever, you know ; and yet—no, Mr. Torrington, I don't love you."

"Ah, but you will—you shall, dear," he said, with a sudden change of tone ; "I will make you. You shall see that you will love me. For, dearest, you are all the world to me—all—all ! My sweet, you do not know what you are to me, or what you must be."

He stopped and panted a little ; his breath came quickly, his hands shook.

"Will you kiss me, Priscilla ?"

The words were few and simple, but into such a lover can breath a fire to consume the world. In the voice of true passion, in its blossoming into speech, nothing enters that is not refined and exalted. But into love comes all things. This is the end of life, which is its beginning ; it is the recompense of sorrow, the crown of joy, the consolation of humanity, the right of the gods. It is awful and sweet, terrible and dear ; it breaks all bars and dissolves all

distances ; it is a religion to itself, a creed and a faith beyond all faiths and creeds. It has sprung upon the earth like a flower ; it has descended from heaven in majesty ; it has risen even from hell in awful purity. It is holy, but with a holiness it draws from itself ; shame it knows not, nor can know ; its beauty is eternal, its rule universal, its throne in the souls of all its worshippers who for once recognise their own divinity and are humble with the great authority of their own power. They are blessed who have known it, even though sorrow asserts its might once more, when the rose of dawn passes in the gray mists of the morning, and the rain and tears and toil of the later day.

And yet she did not kiss him.

“ Ah, it will come in time ! ” he murmured softly into her ear, half hidden in the hair he had praised so, “ it will come in time. ‘ Bless you, dear, it is no quaint fancy in an idle poet to prefer you to a

saint.' No, dear, you are a woman, and I love you. You shall do with me what you will. And I will take you away from your labour. For you will make me work, not for work's sake, but for your own. Ah, Priscilla!" he added, tenderly, "you don't know what you have done. You have destroyed my old ideal. Art for art's sake has become a myth; fame is an idolon, a mere ghost with a squeaking voice. Love's trumpet, with its gold, out- roars her brass whenever he lifts it to his lips; the very flutter of his wings is a melody; and when he sings, as he does now in my heart, there is no music worth making nor another musician in the whole wide earth."

And still she was very silent. She did not understand him. She did not understand herself. She was glad he liked her; his thought of her was a shelter against the world, and yet she was sorry, yet she wavered and was doubtful. For an

old pain hidden even from herself rose up now in her heart and taunted her bitterly.

Did she indeed think the past was past and that she might forget? Nay, she did not, but was weary of conflict, of vain hope, of vain desire. She would have asked God to let her forget and lay her head upon this man's breast if her prayer would have been answered, but, though she esteemed herself one of those who believe, her faith was not so great as to send her on her knees to ask a boon which would have left her glad, though the asking might indeed be bitter. As she lay in bed that night she cried softly to herself, and the burden of her sad thoughts was for ever, "Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

CHAPTER XIV.

PAUL'S VIEW OF THE SITUATION.

PAUL ARMOUR was a man with a conscience and a religion, which was more than could be said of Torrington, who had an almost unusual knack of making the worse appear the better reason. To what extent the difference in the men was due to natural endowment or merely to education would be a hard question to decide satisfactorily, and yet there is little doubt that Armour owed a moral superiority, which Torrington recognised very frankly, to his early training and surroundings.

His parents were country people, admirable in character, strong in body, and both of superb type. The father was of a clever

mechanical turn which early lifted him out of the bitterer struggle for existence ; his mother possessed an energy and sweetness rarely combined, while the principles and religion of both never made life wearisome or the duty they exacted with kindness irksome and irritating. When the elder Armour died he was mourned with a depth of sincerity which spoke better for him than carved marble or inlaid brass, and his son neither needed nor sought a better exemplar of what a man should be.

The home of the widow and her daughters, for Paul had two sisters, was in itself humble, indeed, it was no more than a cottage, but it exerted its influence upon him in many subtle ways. There are women yet in the country who possess their souls in quietness and do no more than comes to their hand, doing it in peace and order. To preserve a home that should be beautiful with these qualities, that should be a pattern to the admiring neighbours whose furniture by no

means shone like this, and in whose chests no such lavender-scented linen was laid up, was no high aspiration but a beneficent and sweetly feminine task. Though her son should go out into the world of labour to strive as his father had done before him, the mother who adored him meant that one place, at least, should be not only his beacon of consolation but a haven of rest as well. And she attained her end.

There is a divine beauty in the far and quiet home which surpasses all the more restless joys of life. Those who have known one and hold its picture in their hearts, though it be but of some humble place that the loud world might scorn, are blessed even in the struggle whose turmoil only reaches its garden like the murmur of an unquiet sea beyond the harbour gates. It has the quality there is in subdued strength, its hold is never exhausted; its power is such and so subtle that its mere remembrance is more real than the troubled

streets of present toil; the scent of its garden, though many winters may have blown its blossoms over the sheltering wall since it was last seen, pours yet with the sunlight of past summers about the head of him who paces London or a foreign city in desolation; the words that were spoken there are voiced again and again in days of doubt and anguish and despair, for over it Time has no power, and even when Death has done its work and destroyed hand and brain and memory, the dead man's deeds were surely wrought out and guided towards a desired end by the influences of the Garden and the Home which never die.

That men, yes, and women, should trust Paul Armour was very natural, and due not only to the palpable kindliness and honesty which would in any case have been his, but to a certain finer instinct of purity owed to the home from which he came, and which, as he held, claimed affectionately, but imperatively, a right conduct from him. He

had often spoken about his mother to Mary Morris, and the vision thus presented to a London girl had been one of infinite charm. His visible affection for all his relations insensibly had its effect upon her; she trusted him wholly.

“I can always believe what you say, Mr. Armour,” she said one day so earnestly that it pleased him and remained in his memory ever afterwards.

“You always can, Mary,” he answered. “At any rate I won’t tell you any lies.”

And then, naturally enough, his conscience smote him, for had he not told her that he was engaged to be married when it was not a fact? However, he dismissed that from his mind, seeing that he believed he had done his duty in inventing a sweetheart down in the country, in order to prevent possible complications. For was it not better that he should be her brother, as it were, and warn her of Torringtons and

suchlike dangers? How easy to deceive one's self it is.

Mary had a day or two of great discomfort after her last visit to Torrington. She was, for one thing, wholly unable to decide what to do, and for another, she wanted to tell Paul what had happened. In one way she was very pleased to be able to refute, so she thought, his unkind suspicions of Torrington, whom she at least liked very much, even if her liking was not yet love; and she went to Paul's studio on the third day, with the intention, the very feminine intention, of saying "There now" with a sequence.

Paul received her very gravely. He had by no means forgotten that she had despised his warnings, and a certain feeling of anger towards Torrington—which he would have denied sprang from jealousy—reacted on his relations with the girl and made him seem almost cold. But he told her he was glad to see her, and what he said was true enough. The conversation for a long time was on

indifferent subjects, for he was determined not to bring Torrington's name in, and she hardly knew how to do it, even though she wished to.

"Have you been playing much, Mr. Armour?" she asked at length, for a pause grew so formidably long that it seemed significant. Paul shrugged his shoulders a little.

"Why no, not since you were here last, Mary," he answered, "except for half an-hour yesterday, when West came in with his violin."

For West was a man of some scope, and delighted in music.

"Oh, I wish I had been here," said the girl.

"You might have been, and I rather thought you would have been," returned Paul, perhaps a little shortly. And again silence settled on them. She could not keep the conversation going, but presently made another attempt.

“Have you been working hard?” she murmured. And then Paul only nodded, which so irritated her in her nervous state that she determined not to speak again until he did; and, as she was seated in a low bottomed leather chair, she put her hand to her cheek, resting her head on it, much as she had done when Torrington first took great notice of her. And Paul, who was clad in a long, loose, grey overall he sometimes worked in when he was biting in his plates in the acid bath, moved about the studio slowly, more with a pretence at doing something than with any actual intention of work.

This Priscilla found very difficult to bear, and she began to feel miserable indeed. It was very hard that he should be so cold to her, when she had always looked to him for advice and assistance. Torrington would not have acted so, although he had only known her such a very short time; and then, her thoughts having turned in

that direction, she began to feel very unhappy, knowing not what she should do. Gradually her strength of mind deserted her. She felt feeble and weak, almost inclined to cry; her hand and head bent lower; the desire for speech went away; she could almost have screamed. Certainly had she been in her own room, she would have thrown herself on the bed and abandoned her soul to grief.

Armour was, of course, hardly aware of what was passing through her mind, yet he was vaguely conscious that she was troubled, and grew angry that it should be so. His anger was naturally enough directed against Torrington, who had been the cause of the slight estrangement he knew had come about between him and this girl, who had, by her sweet feminine sisterly ways, come to be almost necessary to his comfort. He did not know it was so, certainly he did not so phrase it to himself, but that was the real basis of his wrath. He watched Priscilla

out of the corners of his eyes, as he shifted one copper plate after another, cleaned his dabbers, and cleared up his working table, and he began to see that some crisis was imminent. She had never before been so silent, except when he was playing to her, and then she often met his eyes and met them frankly. He wondered what the matter was.

“Damn him,” he said to himself savagely; “if that Torrington——” and then he stopped. There was really no justice in carrying the sentence out. And yet he grew uneasy and uneasy. Presently he thought he saw a tear drop from the girl’s eye. He watched, and soon there was no doubt that she was crying very softly to herself. He put down a plate which he had begun that day, and stood in front of her with his back to the piano, which was an old grand, so that his left hand rested on the end of the opened lid.

“Why, my dear girl,” he said, “what’s the matter?”

Very naturally the kindness and sympathy in his voice made the tears which she had vainly tried to restrain flow faster than ever, and she could not answer. Paul went over to her, and put his hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t cry, Mary,” he said, “tell me what your trouble is?”

And then she sobbed, so that he felt her slight frame shake.

“I don’t know, Mr. Armour, but I am very unhappy.”

“You must be unhappy about something. Tell me what. You always said, if you had any trouble you would tell me. You know that I will help you if I can.”

“I know, Mr. Armour.

“Well, then, what is it?”

She shook her head, and taking out her handkerchief wiped her eyes.

“Oh, it is nothing. I daresay it will

come all right. But I don't know what to do."

Armour shook his head in his turn, for he did not mean to rest satisfied with this assurance. He was intuitively certain that Torrington was at the bottom of this, and he meant finding out. Had he not vowed that he would make him suffer if any trouble or harm came to the girl?

"You don't know what to do?" said he after a pause. "Then you had better tell me, and I will advise you."

"I don't think I ought."

"Why not?"

"Because it isn't altogether about myself."

"Ah!" thought Armour, as his face grew blacker, "I wonder what the devil he's been up to? Oh!" he added aloud, "then you may tell me who it is, at least."

Again she shook her head, though in rather a feeble and undecided way.

“Very well, Mary, if you won’t, I shall have to tell you.”

“But you don’t know, Mr. Armour,” she said in surprise, looking up for the first time.

“It is enough to guess. Now isn’t this all about Torrington?”

He felt her quiver under his hand still lightly laid on her shoulder, and then, being certain he was right, he removed it in order to be able to clench his fist, with which he had little doubt of drubbing Torrington in a thorough manner if he had insulted the girl.

“Now isn’t it about this Torrington?” he repeated almost angrily.

“Yes, Mr. Armour,” she said meekly and timidly, for, though she had desired to tell him, she was rather frightened for reasons of her own.

“What has he been doing to trouble you? Come now, I insist on knowing.”

He looked so big and formidable as he

stood in front of her that she very much doubted if she could possibly help telling him sooner than she intended. But she did not answer, and when Armour repeated the question once more in vain he lost his temper.

"Damn him," he said abruptly. "I'll break his infernal neck."

Priscilla started violently, and looked up in surprise. "Why, Mr. Armour, what for? What has he done?"

Armour would have laughed if the thing hadn't been so serious to him. As it was, he looked a little less grim.

"You foolish girl," he exclaimed, "isn't that what I've been asking you this last hour? And now you ask me?"

"Well," she said, "I meant what had he done that you knew of."

"Confound it," cried Paul. "Why don't you tell me? I have always said I would be a brother to you. And now you are in trouble and this fellow is in it, and you won't tell me what it's all about. Then—

look here. just you tell me the truth. Has Torrington in any way insulted you ? ”

She looked up with her pure eyes straight in his face, and almost smiled.

“ Well Mr. Armour, he—he—well, Mr. Armour, he —— ”

“ Come, out with it ! ”

“ Well, then Mr. Armour,” and she looked down again, “ he asked me to marry him.” And thereon Paul Armour fell back against the piano, staring in astonishment, while his fists unclenched of themselves. Decidedly there was no reason to beat a man into a jelly for asking an unengaged girl to be his wife. It was not generally looked upon as an insult, though in some cases it might be.

“ Ah ! ” said he with a long expiration of breath. And for a while, a long while it seemed to the girl, he did not speak, though he walked up to the other end of the studio, while Priscilla watched him. When he turned round, he was quite calm, but a

little paler than his wont. He stayed where he was, and spoke out of the growing shadow which fell heaviest at the far end of the studio.

"And what are you going to do about it, Mary?" he asked, in a voice which seemed cold to her, simply because it was so restrained.

"I don't know, Mr. Armour," she said a little pettishly.

Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't know? Well, but you have to know. You can't go on not knowing. What did you say to him?"

"I said I couldn't tell him—yet."

"Hum! Well, there is one thing. Do you love him?"

"I like him very much. He seems very kind."

"Yes, I daresay he is." He made a pause. "And I am sorry I ever said anything against him. I don't suppose he can be so bad as I thought him."

Strangely enough, Priscilla would have been better pleased not to have heard him retract. Even though she certainly did like Torrington very much, and had herself defended him from what she had believed unjust aspersions.

“ Well, what am I to do, Mr. Armour ? ”

“ My dear girl, you must do as your heart dictates. If you love him you had better marry him. But if you don't, don't be led into it. I am sure and certain there can be nothing more terrible than marriage without true affection. I can't say any more. It wouldn't be right to you to advise you to say yes, and it wouldn't be fair to him to advise you to say no. You must yourself make the choice. Do you think he is very fond of you ? ”

She nodded and then murmured, “ Yes.” She felt there could be no doubt of that.

“ Well, he has plenty of brains,” said Armour, “ at least that's what I think. And

I believe others think the same. I dare say he will get on very well, if he had something to steady him. But I can't advise you. At least, not now."

And he lapsed into silence, while it grew darker and darker yet. Presently Priscilla rose and was ready to go, for she had not removed her hat.

"You are going?" said Paul interrogatively. "Then I'll walk round with you a little way."

Although he did so he was not a lively companion, for he hardly spoke a word. Yet when they reached her door he stayed a moment.

"Come round on Wednesday and see me, and we will talk this over. Good-night, Mary."

"Good-night, Mr. Armour."

She went in, and going upstairs she threw herself down and wept for a long while until her sister Alice came in with a light and demanded in vain what the matter might

be. But Paul went back to his studio and sat in the darkness thinking how lonely the place seemed after all. He had never thought it quite so desolate before.

END OF VOL. I.









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